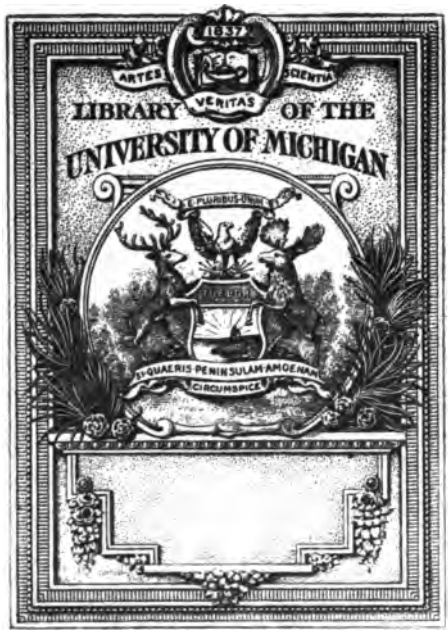
ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
E PLURIBUS UNUM
SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE

SALVAGE

BY

OWEN SEAMAN

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1909

WITH two exceptions, these sets of verse have already appeared in *Punch*, to whose Proprietors I offer my best thanks for their courtesy in allowing me to republish my work.

O. S.

CONTENTS

SALVAGE

WOMEN I HAVE NEVER MARRIED

[N.B.—The following series may be classified under the head of Works of Imagination.]

I.—Priscilla

Priscilla! Had the fates designed
  To weave our mortal webs in one;
Had Love, notoriously blind,
  Not let his bandage come undone;
I tremble even now to think
  How my career, with yours united,
Might have sustained a horrid kink
  And been irrevocably blighted.

In you my callow heart embraced
  What I regarded as a sign
Of dawning literary taste
  Fit to respond, almost, to mine;
You had the right artistic bump,
  The tact (I said), the intuition
That apprehend a poet's hump
  During the pangs of composition.

You may have had. I don't suggest
  That youthful judgment read you wrong;
You would, no doubt, have done your best
  To help me through my throes of song;
Rather my scorn is levelled at
  The hollow hopes a lover nurses
Who dreams that such a type as that
  Would tend to lubricate his verses.

I'm wiser now: I've come to know
  The kind that holds your writing hand
And smooths your brow and murmurs low:
  "Poor darling! How I understand!"
They *don't*, of course! They *cannot* see
  (Their minds are built with this hiatus)
How one revolts from sympathy
  When wrestling with a rhyme-afflatus.

Well, well, Priscilla, I am weaned
  From what was once a poignant pain;
And bless his eyes who intervened—
  The broker-man from Mincing Lane;
He won your hand, good honest soul,
  And if it still persists in stroking
His flabby paw, or polished poll,
  I doubt if that disturbs his broking.

Why have these thoughts just now occurred?
  It is July the Fourth, my dear,
The day on which he spoke the word
  Into your pink and willing ear;

And there is not, I dare to say,
  A free-born Yank across the tide who
Keeps up his "Independence Day"
  With purer, holier joy than I do.

II.—DORA

My Dora, how the days have gone
  Since I, in Cupid's constant thrall,
Considered every goose a swan,
  And you the swanliest of them all!
The thing you did was always right;
  About your simplest act or motion
Lingered the iridescent light
  That never was on land or ocean.

Once, it is true, I thought I traced
  A hint of something less refined;
It turned upon a point of taste:—
  I asked your hand and you declined;
Still "Youth," I urged, "is seldom wise,
  It needs to undergo correction;
Some day she'll come to recognise
  The loss entailed by this rejection."

But now I thank the kindly Fate
  Which in the mask of Wounded Love
Left me, just then, disconsolate
  Owing to treatment as above;

For you have lost your maiden dower;
  You are a Woman in the Fashion,
And Bridge, from fevered hour to hour,
  Is now your one and wasting passion.

We meet at dinner. You are pale;
  An odour on the ambient air
Of club tobacco, pungent, stale,
  Steals from your loosely ordered hair;
I note the vacant eyes that show
  Their circling tell-tale lines of sable,
The restless hands that move as though
  They sought the little green-cloth table.

My gayest sallies seem to irk
  Your absent mind. You eat as one
Who gathers strength for serious work
  That waits her when the meal is done;
At last your hostess leads the way,
  Bidding curtail our port and prattle,
And lo! you prick your ears and neigh
  Like a war-mare that scents the battle.

We follow where the cards are spread;
  I mark your animated mien,
Your face a little flushed with red,
  Your eyes perhaps a thought too keen.
Alert to seize the subtlest clues,
  Bold in assault, a stout defender—
If you could only bear to lose
  You might be almost any gender!

Yet, as I watch you play the game
  That "gives to life its only zest"
(Life, as you understand the same),
  Indeed you hardly look your best;
Missing the cool detached repose
  That ought to stamp your cast of features,
You miss the charm that Woman throws
  Over us men and lower creatures.

There is a thought I will adapt
  From someone else's wisdom's wealth
(A polished orator, and apt
  To toast aloud the Ladies' health),
In proof how low your lapse must be
  From what a start to what a sequel:
You once were worth ten score of me,
  And now—I count you scarce my equal.

III.—EMMELINE

She was "a phantom of delight,"
  One of those rare elusive things
Detained this side the *Ewigkeit*
  Through temporary want of wings;
Our world was not her natural place,
  Rather she seemed a priceless relic
Of Faerieland's enchanted grace,
  She was so birdlike, so angelic.

I often wondered what she ate;
  She looked as though she lived on air,
Or, if she fed from off a plate,
  Would only touch ambrosial fare;
No man that dealt in butcher's meat
  Had ever been allowed to victual
With stuff we common mortals eat
  A form so exquisitely brittle.

Such were my views when first I fell,
  In salad days still fairly green,
Beneath the spiritual spell
  Of my unearthly Emmeline;
She had on me a marked effect:
  Each moment spent in gazing at her
Tended to make me more select,
  And purge my soul of grosser matter.

And yet a fear assailed my mind
  When I reviewed my purposed vows—
Whether a being so refined
  Would make a good domestic spouse;
Would she, as fits a faithful wife
  (The thought already left me thinner),
Count it her chief concern in life
  To see that I enjoyed my dinner?

She whom (I guessed) a currant bun
  Sufficed for hunger's faint appeals—
Would she respect, when we were one,
  My prejudice for decent meals?

Anxious for some assuring sign
  To clinch my hesitating passion,
I asked my angel out to dine
  At London's first resort of Fashion.

She came. She passed a final word
  Upon the *bisque*, the *Mornay* sole,
The *poulet* (said she thought the bird
  Shewed at its best *en casserole*);
She found the *parfait* "quite first-rate,"
  Summed up the *chef* as "rather handy,"
Knew the Lafitte for '88,
  And twice encored a fine old brandy.

I own I felt an inward pain,
  When she put off her seraph airs,
To find I had to entertain
  An earthly angel unawares;
I merely asked her there to test
  Her aptness for a wifely calling,
And never dreamed that she possessed
  A special knowledge so appalling!

Frankly, she went a shade too far.
  It was a shock—I feel it still—
To learn that what I deemed a star
  Was just an ember off the grill!
Well, twenty years or so have gone,
  And now I meet her (ah, the pity!),
A puffy matron serving on
  The "New Amphitryon Club" Committee.

IV.—JOAN

How quickly these impressions wane!
  I think—but would not like to swear—
It must have been the *mise-en-scène*
  That drew me first to Joan Adair;
For I have sampled many a view
  Before and since, but never seen a
More likely spot for Love's *début*—
  Take it all round—than Taormina.

Sheer crags above, and, sheer below,
  The shifting light on narrow seas;
Southward the crater, crowned with snow,
  That swallowed poor Empedocles;
Ruins of Roman play-house walls
  (Hellenic in their prime construction);—
'Twas there, in two adjacent stalls,
  That we dispensed with introduction.

"O Isle of Greater Greece!" I thought;
  "O famous Syracusan shore!"
For memory moved me, strangely fraught
  With little tags of classic lore;
So that her air, fresh-blown and blonde
  (My fancy being somewhat flighty),
Appeared to me to correspond
  Roughly to that of Aphrodite.

And yet a goddess over-ripe
  In the technique of Love his trade
Scarce seemed a proper prototype
  For so demure a British maid;
Better that I should take the style
  Of *Ferdinand* (wrecked off Girgenti?)
Who found *Miranda* of the Isle,
  A trusting girl of eight-and-twenty.

That lovely heroine's lot was cast
  Remote from men; and, much the same,
Dear Joan, it seemed, had had no past,
  But barely lived before I came.
'Twas well! The warrior sort might choose
  Rivals to rout in open action,
But I with my civilian views
  Preferred to be the sole attraction.

What might have happed I won't enquire;
  For Fate that guards my guileless head
Summoned me home by instant wire
  Before the crucial word was said;
And when, in London's giddier scenes,
  Once more we met I nearly fainted
To find her not by any means
  The lonely chicken I had painted.

I that was once so nice and near
  Felt like a stranger far apart,
Wholly unread in that career
  Which others seemed to know by heart;

These were "her men;" I heard her call
  Their Christian names—Tom, Dick and Harry,
Yet not a man among them all
  Had thought her good enough to marry!

No shadow, so I heard, had crept
  Across the lady's fair repute
Explaining what it was that kept
  The voice of Matrimony mute;
Her 'scutcheon bore no kind of blot;
  She had admirers brave and many;
But as to marriage—they were not,
  In vulgar parlance, "taking any."

Slowly and with reluctant pain
  This doubt arose to give me pause:
Do girls of twenty-eight remain
  Spinsters without a cogent cause?
Why should I risk to bark my shin
  Against the steps of Hymen's altar?
Why, like a fool, rush madly in
  Where wiser men preferred to falter?

V.—GRACE

People who understand the gist
  Of Browning's views on married life
Assert that, in his special list
  Of requisites for man and wife,
He notes that each should have a different bent
And be the other party's complement.

True that, in practice, Mrs. B.
  (I will not say which had it worse)
Shared in a very marked degree
  Her Robert's fatal gift of verse;
But still his published theory of Love
Lays down the principle I cite above.

Taking this golden rule for guide,
  I, of the somewhat flippant vein,
Wanted a weighty sort of bride
  To ballast my so buoyant brain;
I felt that she, the woman I should wed,
Must be supremely serious in the head.

And such was Grace. The heart divines
  These natures by a second sight;
And certain rather pointed lines,
  Writ in her album, proved me right:
"*Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever*"—
And this, I saw, was her precise endeavour.

And yet our loves did not succeed;
  For though her weight (I here refer
To moral worth) supplied my need,
  I was a touch too light for her;
Against the rules that regulate the love-tale
Our complementary tastes refused to dovetail.

She had a trick I could not bear:
  She tried (I might have known she would)

To trace, beneath my ribald air,
  "Potentialities for good";
This was to be her future wifely *rôle*,
Namely, to extricate my lurking soul.

"The world may think you what it will,
  But Love," she said, "has keener eyes,
And probes with nice, unerring skill
  Beyond the formal crust, or guise;
Under your thinnish coat of comic art
Crouches a grave, austere and noble heart!"

She meant it well. She could not see—
  Alas! how seldom women can!—
That Art, a sacred thing to me,
  Must needs reflect the inner Man;
That Humour's motley-wear could never hide
What she attributed to my inside.

Indeed, to take the converse case,
  If I had been a serious bard,
Would she, I ask, have had the face
  To hint that Love's profound regard
Could penetrate the solemn outer sheath
And find the genuine mountebank beneath?

Enough. She had to speak the word
  That loosed my irritating bands;
And though my gallant tongue demurred,
  And though I raised protesting hands,
A lofty resignation lit my face
The moment she had dealt her *coup de* Grace.

THE OLD SONGS

A Parental Rebuke

And so you find them somewhat thin,
The songs that made your sire to grin
When mid-Victorian modes were in?

You snort at that historic wit
Which once provoked in stall and pit
The frequent apoplectic fit?

The hoar and hallowed tag that got
Home on the intercostal spot
Now seems the most amazing rot?

Yet were it rash, my boy, for you
To entertain the impious view
(Held, as I hear, by one or two),

That, Humour having changed its style
From what inspired your parent's smile,
His taste was relatively vile.

'Tis true that Time has dulled the fame
(Almost, I fear, beyond reclaim)
Of *Champagne Charlie is my name;*

'Tis true that rolling years obscure
The subtle charm, the fine allure,
That underlay *The Perfect Cure;* *

But, *en revanche*, the vogue of rhymes
Which you have heard a hundred times
Emitted by your favourite mimes—

The last comedian's lyric verse
On which you waste your nightly purse—
Affect me like a funeral hearse;

Or would, at least, affect me so
If I could be induced to go
To this depressing kind of Show.

Therefore, my son, if you are wise,
You will observe without surprise
The wayward shifts of Humour's guise;

Nor deem another's taste is cheap
If where you laugh he wants to weep,
Or giggles while you go to sleep.

You, too, in turn, may have a son,
And marvel how he finds his fun
In wheezes where you notice none.

* The following extract illustrates the tenor of what has been described as "a colossal success of another generation":—

"With my hi gee-wo,
There I do go,
For I'm the perfect cure."

For here, on this terrestrial ball,
Nations and markets rise and fall,
But Humour wobbles most of all.

No man may say, with hand on breast,
Challenging Time to be its test,
"Lo! I have wrought a Cosmic Jest."

And he alone of other folk
Can still be stable as an oak,
Who never made, or saw, a joke.

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT BRIGAND-CHIEF

It was an ancient brigand-chief,
  And a horny eye had he,
And the lethal weapons that lined his belt
  Would have stocked an armoury.

Around the camp-fire's ruddy glow
  His followers sniffed the breeze;
Half-cock (or more) each stalwart bore
  His blunderbuss at ease.

Then up and spake that ancient sport:
  "I have a tale to tell—";
The brigands sighed and yawned full wide,
  They knew the wheeze so well.

"It was September's opening day,
  To British sportsmen dear—";
That was the way the tale began
  Steadily once a year;
By his own request he told that geste,
  And they could not choose but hear.

"'Tis fifty years ago to-day
  Sithence this thing occurred;
We sallied out a merry rout
  To slay the partridge bird.

"Brand-new my suit of Tartan check,
  Wrought of the Scots home-spun;
In brand-new boots I tramped the roots
  Beneath a brand-new gun.

"My eye was bright, my step was light,
  My heart was hot within,
And all for a maid whose peerless love
  I rather hoped to win.

"She was a sporting damosel,
  Well knowing what was what,
And had vowed she never would yield her hand
(So I was given to understand)
  Save to a first-class shot.

"Therefore with many a prayer that I
  That day might earn renown,
I blazed to right, I blazed to left,
  I blazed into the brown;
I blazed the livelong morning through,
From 10.15 to nearly 2.0,
  But never a bird came down.

"We had reached the final turnip-patch,
  Nor yet had I tasted gore,
When lo! a single bird arose
Immediately beneath my nose,
Of somewhat larger size than those
  I had observed before.

"It was my chance ere luncheon brought
  The ladies in its train;

I gave the bird a yard or so,
Then, letting both my barrels go,
  I blew the thing in twain.

"'Ha! ha!' I cried; but the guns replied
  All down the line with 'Shame!';
It seems that I had felled to earth
  A pheasant, young and tame;
'Twas wrong, said they, such birds to slay
  Or ever October came.

"At lunch they laughed; I even heard
  My winsome lady howl;
For on my platter they had spread
The sections, obviously dead,
  Of that infernal fowl.

"Laughter and gibe from rude coarse men
  Ere now have made me curse;
But to be mocked of one you love,
  O that is far, far worse.

"My blood was up; I filled a cup
  Full of the gold Rhine wine;
Drank 'Death to bird and man and beast!'
And straightway left that grisly feast
  With never a farewell sign.

"Thenceforth I swore all living things
  Should lie beneath my ban;
I swore to seek some larger clime
Where I could kill, with no close time
  For bird or beast or man.

"Comrades! In these Circassian parts
  Where life runs fairly cheap,
With Tartar and Turk and Jew for game
Have I not purged my ancient shame?
Say!" But the brigands said no word
By way of comment upon the bird—
  Being, in fact, asleep.

TO A FRIEND, ABOUT TO MARRY BEER

Herbert, as you describe the gifted creature
  That weaves about your heart her golden spell,
I gather she is Philistine of feature
  But in her converse strangely *spirituelle;*
Her figure may be sketchy, but in mental
  And moral graces she's a flawless pearl,
And to the arts of forty adds a rental
    Fit for a bloated earl.

My boy, I do not here propose to pamper
  Your very pardonable self-esteem,
Nor, on the other hand, to throw a damper
  Over the dawn of Youth's romantic dream;
I pass no comment on the situation
  Save to extract from memory's mouldy stores
A case that fell within my observation
    Analogous to yours.

He, too, that other pauper, nursed a passion
  For one whose shekels matched the shower of Jove;
He thought to live a life of *luxe* and fashion
  Wed to the purple—or, at least, the mauve.
What happened? Halfway through the moon of honey
  He had become the queen-bee's humble drone,
And failed to touch sufficient ready-money
    To call his soul his own.

In clear and bell-like notes that wouldn't falter,
Not though the parson twitched a dubious brow,
He had informed his heiress at the altar:
"WITH ALL MY WORLDLY GOODS I THEE ENDOW."
Whereas 'twas she who bought his youth and beauty,
Paid for 'em like a man—or *said* she'd pay,
And shifted on to him the wifely duty
To "honour and obey."

My boy, I mention this by way of warning,
Not that you have an eye for filthy pelf;
You love the lady for her mind's adorning,
I'm sure you love her solely for herself;
Yet, Herbert, since the human heart is fickle
And verbal promises are often trash,
See that you have a settlement, and stickle
For something round in cash.

A CHANNEL RECORD

[Mr. Swinburne's poem, "A Channel Passage," begins in a trochaic-dactylic-catalectic metre, of no fewer than eight beats, and changes with the rising of the storm to an anapæstic-iambic-acatalectic metre of seven beats. The author of the following lines has humbly ventured to go one beat better throughout. The apparent licence which permits him to scan "rapturous," "satiate," "gradual," and "livelier," as dissyllables is strictly derived from the original. He dedicates these verses in passionate admiration to the Anglo-French marvel, Mr. Thomas William Burgess, of Paris, and late of Rotherham, Yorks.]

Forth from Dover at 7 A.M., at the hour when
the milk comes round for the Castle Mess,
Fared the tug that bore on her prancing poop
the joy and pride of the halfpenny Press;
Gnat was the name of her, late returned from
the nightlong lustre of waves at her luminous
prow,
Lit for a beacon and *buffet* to him, the hero of
Teuton extraction that failed, and now,
Fraughted with Burgess for freight, or freighted
with Burgess for fraught, whichever arrange-
ment you like,
Westward she lurched to the region of Lyddon
Sprout and landed the rapturous and radiant
Tyke.
Then like a lioness loosed from the toils on the
flat-foot track of a timorous coolie of Ind,

Bare as a babe he strided out hip-deep to the lust of battle with wave and wind;
Plunged his billow-proof mask in the main, and adopting a low side-stroke of exceptional power
Thridded the seas at the rate of two-and-a-half to three full nautical knots per hour.
Loud from the tug as he sped like a friendly torpedo aimed at the uttermost fringes of France
Cheers outbroke and the bruit of backers that asked for the odds, fifteen to eight, on his chance.
Slewed by slithering tides, that played with his strength as the blizzard plays with a young boy's kite,
Now on the Foreland trail and now in the other direction, the way to the Isle of Wight,
Ever he struck for the Calais coast with the brine in his breath and the red hope hot at his heart,
Save when he sipped boiled Bovril or crushed the juice of the wine-blue grape or a custard tart;
Till the homeward Mail with a starboard list where the clamour of plaudits clove the air
Spake from the midmost deeps of her course to say that the gallant swimmer was half-way there.

Whence came change? Were the powers that
govern the moon that governs the tides that
flow and ebb
Jealous that one more name should be added
to those of Byron, Leander, and Captain
Webb?
Can they have kicked at the last link forged
in a chain designed to master a virgin
pride,
Knitting adjacent lands in love, as a neighbourly
bridegroom is knit to his next-door bride?
What the original reason I know not; but this
at least that a mortal may know, I know,
How that the winds that had softly blown in his
eyes as the breath, kiss-laden, of love may
blow
Rose to the passion and wrath and rapture of
half a gale or possibly even worse,
Thus necessitating a delicate change in the lilt
of my semi-trochaic verse.

For the welter of waves white-winged as the
flash and the flight of a squadron of migrant
storks
Flew, flopped, fizzed, fluttered and burst in the
face of the strenuous trier from Rotherham,
Yorks,
And the tune of their sibilant surge was the
tune of the mellowing ferment of malted
hops,

And like to the hiss of a spluttering grill was
the spume of the Channel that seethed with
chops.
But livelier if aught could be livelier than he
was ere yet the storm leapt out of the South
We could hear his foam-bright laughter that
gurgled and mixed with the gurgling foam
in his mouth,
And the jest fell light from his lips as he
breasted the billow—"There's plenty for
money," he said,
In a phrase that can only die when the heart of
England that beats for her best lies dead.
But a desolate waste yet sundered the sole of
his foot from the haven he fain would
be at,
And the sea's wide throat that would never have
strained at a camel had nearly swallowed
the *Gnat*.
And at length with gradual reluctance he halted
and over the creaking bulwarks crept
And drank red wine, and rolled in the wallowing
trough, and was sick of the sea and slept.
And the eight-and-three-quarter glad mad hours
were over that won him the record for
pace,
Five leagues as the swart crow flies, and an
extra couple to add for the twin tide-race.
But snug in a rug we bore him back from a spot
some six miles short of his goal,

Of the sand-grey dunes of the city whose fame is
one with the fame of her burgess-roll.
And the dawn of the dusk came down from a
wind-swept sky as we put him on Dover
pier,
Insatiate of hope, and big with a sanguine pur-
pose to try it again next year.

THE POET TO HIS SUFFRAGETTE

If in that hour of triumph when you passed
(Accompanied by *Do ye ken John Peel?*)
From dungeon-walls to break your dreadful fast
Where Mr. Miles purveys the fruity meal—
Forgive me if through absence, O my fair,
I was just then not there.

Present in spirit I could still observe
" Shades of the prison-house " upon your brow,
And, poised above, the halo's airy curve,
Symbol of martyrdom's accomplished vow;
And hear the thud of your heroic feet
Shattering Chandos Street.

Perchance you found my absence rather odd
When you debouched from out your loathly cell?
Yet I had thought on you detained in quad,
Pallid and tousled; I had pondered well
How great a thing you were, how near the sky,
And what a worm was I.

In dreams I waved a banner by your side
And frankly owned: " This is no place for me!
She needs a nobler mate, this virile bride,
A hardier brand than I could hope to be;
I am not made (one has to be so tough)
Of the right martyr-stuff."

Then I have certain foibles, all accurst,
  Such as a lingering sentiment for sex,
A modest tap of humour, bound to burst
  When you are prancing on a prostrate X;
These would obscure my vision of the True;
      Yes, I should never do.

So, Loveliest, I release you. All is o'er.
  I will not grumble; I am only sad,
A little sad because I must deplore
  Your uninstructed taste, who might have had
This pillowy heart to press, but chose to wed
      A ballot-box instead!

THE SLUMP IN POETS

[With condolences to Mr. John Lane, of the Bodley Head.]

Lo! where a Century lies still-born
  The Patron's tears come down like sleet,
And barren cries from lips forlorn
  Ring on the roofs of Vigo Street;
In vain among the groves to search,
  Cheerless and bare and dumb and chilly,
Where vocal fowls were wont to perch
  Just at the back of Piccadilly.

Scarce half a score of years have sped
  (Who was it wrote that "Art is long"?)
Since every hair on Bodley's Head
  Harboured a separate bird of song;
Yes, that enchanted spot was then
  A very Zoo of *aves raræ*—
The pencilled lark, the Gallic hen,
  The yellow rook, the blue canary.

Imbibing Heliconian dew,
  Nightjar and jay and turtle-dove
Sang Bacchus and his satyr crew,
  Silenus, Liberty and Love;

All day, and loudest after dark,
  Their shrill and space-defying chorus
Would reach as far as Bedford Park,
  It was so poignant, so sonorous.

But now—poor Hippocrene is dry,
  Where once, with heavenly wings unfrayed,
Squadrons of prancing Pegasi
  Swept up the Burlington Arcade;
And if you ask, "Where springs the rill
  That laves the local Muse's Mountain?"
You will be thought an imbecile,
  And told to try the Shaftesbury Fountain.

I have a friend that lately found
  A pilgrim, come from oversea,
Pacing, as if on holy ground,
  The cloisters of The Albany,
Who said: "Right here, Sir, I opine,
  Your British Muse is still located?"
Whereat the other made no sign,
  Deeming his man inebriated.

Where lies the cause that facts are thus?
  A dearth of topics? Surely no!
Why, what about the Motor-bus,
  The Tubes and Bridge and L'Art Nouveau?
May not the loftiest poet find
  Inspiring stuff in modern movements,
And trace a beauty (undesigned)
  Even in things like Strand "improvements"?

Alas! the evil lies within;
  It is the lust for higher pay,
The passion (so debased) to win
  Fortune by some more facile way;
Greedy to pouch the larger loaf,
  Young men who might have made our verses
Prefer to tout, or type, or chauff,
  Or ride as mutes on funeral hearses.

And this is why no bards occur.
  None ever knows that aching void,
The hunger, prompting like a spur,
  Which former genii enjoyed;
For all the poets dead and gone
  Whose Muse contrived to melt the nation
Habitually did it on
  A regimen of strict starvation.

Yet is the fault not theirs alone
  Who love their ease before their Art;
The public's self is somewhat prone
  To let its stomach blunt its heart;
For men in these expansive times
  (Due, I am told, to fiscal freedom),
Though earth were black with angels' rhymes,
  Dine far too well to want to read 'em.

THE BIRTHRIGHT OF THE FREE

[Mr. Haldane has given it as his opinion that the country "will not be dragooned into Conscription." In other, and less conventional, terms, it is the inalienable right of the freeborn British citizen to decline to lift a finger in his country's defence. This right is exercised by about 95 per cent. of the employees of London; and it is to any one of that vast majority that these lines are addressed.]

O specimen of London's virile type,
  A dashing figure with your farthing "smoke,"
So much more gentlemanly than the pipe
    Of us inferior folk;

How brave you show at some salubrious Spa,
  Or patronising Southend shrimps and tea,
Seductive in a so-called Panama
    Beside the so-called sea.

Your town-bred wit enraptures all who use
  The boarding-house abutting on the brine;
And, could he follow it, would much amuse
    The waiter from the Rhine.

Him you regard as matter for contempt,
  Poor Teuton, seared with vile Conscription's brand,
Not, like yourself, a nobleman exempt
    From duty to his land!

You are a free-born Englishman, and boast
That you can buy the necessary slaves—
Tommies that undertake to man the coast,
And Tars to walk the waves.

Besides, the leisure hours in which you slack
Are owed to Sport—the Briton's primal law;
You have to watch a game of ball, or back
A horse you never saw.

Splendid, *mon brave!* you have a sporting nerve
Unknown to these dull churls of Teuton breed;
Yet here's a man has learned at least to serve
His Fatherland at need.

He sings his *Wacht am Rhein*, and, if the thing
Wants watching with a rifle, he'll be there;
When *you*'ve invited Heaven to "save the King"
You think you've done your share.

They've taught him how to march in fighting kit
And drill a likely hole in human butts;
You have no discipline and couldn't hit
A haystack, not for nuts.

His womankind are safe in their appeal
To his protection when the bullets skirl,
While your "fionsy"—well, I really feel
Quite sorry for the girl.

For this poor "conscript" whom the tyrants grind,
Though he may miss your British freedom's scope,
Yet knows the use of arms, where you would find
Your legs your only hope.

So doff your hat to him when next you meet,
And pray that, when his 'prentice task is done,
If you should cross him on a raiding beat,
He'll give you time to run.

ORAL QUESTIONS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

I.

Between the *soufflé* and the ice,
  When talk was running very small
Like little forage-hunting mice
  Whose patter hardly counts at all—
You asked me, as a thing you vaguely pitied
  (Noting the while another woman's gown),
Whether it bored me, when the World had flitted,
    To stay behind in Town?

I answered briefly, "No, it don't."
  (My many candid friends agree
That it has never been my wont
  To shine in oral repartee;
But only give me time and works of reference,
  Those mental aids which Parliament permits,
And I can be a match, with all due deference,
    For Ministerial wits.)

Madam—for I will here expand
  That answer given a week ago—
It is indeed a desert land
  That misses you in Mall and Row;

One has, I grant, to suffer these privations
  Among the annual debts that Duty owes,
But yet, believe me, there are consolations,
    More than you might suppose.

Thus, while you fly to rural spots
  (Like Cowes) and dress five times a day,
Our country cousins leave their cots
  To paint the Town a rustic gray;
I love to see them sampling Nelson's column
  Or Albert's effigy (a certain draw),
Giddy with rapture tempered by a solemn
    Touch of mysterious awe.

While you affect, in hall or bower,
  With Nature's moods to mate your mind,
You leave the finest, fairest flower
  Of Town's intelligence behind:—
The Civil Service Clerk who never ceases
  From his employ of propping up the State;
The Press that still composes masterpieces
    Superbly up to date.

And one there is, a very god—
  I'd spoil my summer just for this,
To tread the dust his feet have trod,
  And share the same Metropolis;
At other times there seems no special reason
  Why he should occupy this earthly sphere,
But in the void of London's empty season
    He is without a peer.

His is the Editorial fist
  With which, in August's dearth of news,
Imaginary scribes insist
  Upon the right to air their views;
"*Pater-* (you know the signature) *-familias,*"
  "*Mother of Nine,*" "*Brixtonian,*" "*Better Dead*"—
He represents the universal silly ass
    Alone and on his head.

What you would deem the myriad shout
  Of father, husband, mother, wife,
Touching the question, fraught with doubt,
  "*Should Men adopt the Married Life?*"—
The hints you get of dark domestic dramas,—
  He fakes them by the column (that's his trade),
Clad in a cummerbund and pink pyjamas
    At 80° in the shade.

Madam, you have my answer there.
  You see that I can well afford,
Even when you are gone elsewhere,
  To face the risk of being bored;
Be mine to live (though I may never enter
  The priestly sanctum where he sits apart)
Within a shilling radius of the centre
    Of England's pulsing heart.

II.

In that most trying hour of all the day,
  When hallowed custom claims this act of grace,
That men should throw the unfinished weed away,
  And join the ladies in another place;
When, torpid with excess of meat and drink,
  In single file, a ludicrous procession,
We feel the mood of exaltation sink
  Down to the nadir, point of worst depression;—

Noting my apathy, you deftly sought
  A likely theme to pierce the carnal cloud,
And asked if I believed that human thought
  Might by a special gift be read aloud;
I answered "Certainly; for by your look
  That gift is yours and, if you care to use it,
My mind just now is like an open book,
  And you are very welcome to peruse it."

That was my flattery. You read me wrong
  When you divined that in my vapid brain
One lonely thought revolved:—*How long, how long*
  Before I get the chance to smoke again!
I had another, chastely held in check,
  And it was this (for absence makes me bolder):—
I really rather like the way her neck
  Goes with the pretty dip to meet her shoulder.

But, gravely,—you who probe the inner man—
  I'd not discourage you with cynic smile
From reading people's thoughts as best as you can,
  If they are legible and worth your while;
But here in so-called England you will find
  This art of yours a thankless thing to follow,
For when you perforate our outer rind
  You come on nothing but a yawning hollow.

Void of ideas, and vain of being void,
  We eat and sleep and rise to play at ball,
Cocksure that we are far too well employed
  To want to entertain a thought at all;
You must not think between (or during) meals!
  This is our law; for, if it grew more lenient,
Conscience might trouble us with vague appeals,
  And that would prove extremely inconvenient.

Such is the reason why the race maintains
  Its prophylactic vacancy of head,
And it would save you much expense of pains
  To take the thoughts which aren't inside as read;
Indeed, dear lady, till our habits mend
  And yield material for you to handle,
Thought-reading seems a game on which to spend
  Only a very little length of candle.

III.

When you, my boy, with ill-considered riot
  Raided the sanctum where I wished to brood
Over my luncheon, and in perfect quiet
    Assimilate my food;

When, breathing airs of most untimely revel,
  Blent with ozone, the famous Norfolk brand,
You advocated "rounders" on the level
    Of loose retarding sand;

I saw the scene; I saw as in a vision,
  Knowing my length of years and what I weighed,
I should infallibly provoke derision
    From the Marine Parade.

Therefore I pleaded eld and eld's infirmities,
  Urging that, if there ever comes a stage
When such pursuits have reached their natural term, it is
    At forty odd (my age).

And lo! like Eve's, when she secured the apple
  Which opened out new worlds and wondrous strange,
Your intellect at first refused to grapple
    With life's extended range.

The monstrous figures left you almost blinded,
  Till Pity, which my parlous case begat,
Moved you to ask me if I greatly minded
    Being as old as that.

I answered: "Age, my boy, is manhood's glory,
So it be sequent on a well-spent youth;"
Whereat you smiled as one who hears a story
Palpably void of truth.

Yet you were wrong in thinking, gay young scoffer,
"The grapes are sour at which he grasps in vain;"
I would not be, not if I had the offer,
A bounding boy again.

The ardours incident to adolescence,
So like its favoured beverage, ginger-pop,
Where flatness follows close on effervescence,
I am content to drop.

King Solomon, arrived at perfect sanity
(He had of course a more bizarre career),
Ventured the view that life was largely vanity,
To which I say: "Hear, hear!"

Not easily we come to these conclusions;
It costs us something—and we bear the trace—
To sacrifice a lot of dear illusions,
To yield, with smiling face,

Boyhood's instinctive claim to fair requital
For labour of the hand or heart or mind,
And learn that what we once considered vital
Is nothing of the kind.

So, though I wish my limbs were more elastic,
I like the balanced calm that Age enjoys,
Having survived the process, rudely plastic,
That makes for equipoise.

* * * * *

P.S.—I think it might perhaps be better,
Not to acidulate your youthful cup,
And so, my boy, I will not send this letter,
But simply tear it up.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TURF

Regarded as England's great source of "joy in widest commonalty spread."

England, I hear your health is simply rotten,
  That you have lost your old prehensile clutch
On popular ideals, and forgotten
  Those common faiths of which a single touch,
    Sharp as a pin,
  Was warranted to keep the nation kin.

They tell me how a gulf as deep as Ocean
  Divides us, class from class, and kind from kind;
That as a race we cease to share emotion,
  Nor can you simultaneously find
    The self-same flutter
  Of pulses in a palace and a gutter.

I'll not believe it. I refuse to credit
  That view of England's vitals gone amiss;
I say—and other optimists who edit
  The Sporting Press will bear me out in this—
    One thing remains
  That fires the universal heart and brains.

It is the Turf! Ah! there you have a passion
  Which all, without respect of caste, may blow
Their time, their talents, and their ready cash on,
  Conscious of myriad types, for weal or woe,
    Sharing their lot,
  According as the Favourite wins or not.

Yon Arab imp that, having staked his dinner,
  Borrows a *Star* to find he's won a bob—
Not Midas, with a "monkey" on the winner,
  Feels in his fatted heart a livelier throb!
    He and the boy
  Thrill with an indistinguishable joy!

Is it not odd that hitherto no poet
  Has thought to mention how, with lord and serf,
Whether they plunge thereon, or rest below it,
  There is no equaliser like the Turf?
    Whatso our claim,
  The Starting Price is one, and Death the same.

THE MAN THAT MIGHT

"C'était un homme d'un bien beau passé."

Of all the heroes I have met,
  Condemned to unfulfilled renown,
One figure holds my fancy yet—
  It is the late Alexis Brown.

Long ere he burst his primal gum
  His friends expressed the sanguine hope
That he would certainly become
  A credit to his horoscope.

His lessons caused him no concern;
  He never deigned to strive or cry;
And if he failed at any turn
  It was because he didn't try.

As buds beneath the vernal sun
  His native reputation grew,
Chiefly by what he could have done
  If he had only chosen to.

At school Alexis took the lead,
  Just like an heir of ancient kings,
Exempted from the vulgar need
  Of actually doing things.

He bore his undisputed fame
  To Oxford (learning's awful seat),
Yet never justified the same
  By any noticeable feat.

Had he but read a single book,
  He must no doubt have topped the tree;
Yet, as a fact, he simply took
  A portion of the Pass degree.

He might with perfect ease have gained
  A triple Blue, as rumour goes;
Only he somehow felt constrained
  To keep his talents in repose.

He ate his dinners term by term,
  And very nearly joined the Bar,
But still omitted to confirm
  The promise of his natal star.

So to the end Alexis fared,
  And when he ultimately died
His faithful backers all declared
  He could have lived, *if he had tried.*

Even in death he shrank from strife,
  And in his epitaph you'll find
This record of a quiet life:
  "*He left a great career behind.*"

TO VENUS, SHOT IN HER TRACKS

'Twas but a week, a little week away—
  Beneath the usual scowl of summer skies,
Pending the absence of the orb of day,
  I sunned myself against your glowing eyes,
Until my blood, whose temperature was *nil*,
        Got fairly off the chill.

Gold were your locks, and most of them your own;
  Your lips were such a nice geranium red;
And on your cheeks the cherry's ruddy tone
  Was not too ruddy. Briefly, from your head
Downwards, and ending in your dainty feet,
        I thought you rather sweet.

But now what change is this, what sudden blight?
  For I have seen you in the halfpenny Press
Snapped at a garden-party, and the sight
  Of what was lately so much loveliness,
Blistered and blurred and damaged past repair,
        Has blanched my raven hair.

Your features, as reported in the print,
  Are simply pulp and black as any crow's;
Your eyes, a brace of blobs, reveal no hint
  Of speculation, and your charming nose,
Your charming nose that had my chest in thrall,
        Cannot be traced at all.

What devastating cataclysm has wrought
  The hideous shock that leaves your face so
    marred?
Can you yourself have been (distressing thought!)
  The prey of passion hopelessly ill-starred?
I too have lost my heart, and mourn the theft,
    Yet have *some* features left.

Can Art have played you false? Ah no, I cry;
  The Kodak which illumes our morning sheets,
Mirror of Actuality, *cannot lie!*
  So for a solace I must turn to Keats:
Truth equals Beauty!—that was Keats's view.
    Let's hope he really knew.

"SWEET USES OF OBESITY"

[Lines suggested by an article under the above title, from the pen of Mrs. Ernest Ames, who discusses the popularity, the social precedence, the immunity from control and criticism, enjoyed by the very, very fat woman.]

What guerdon of praise shall I give her,
  What measure of thanks for her meed,
Who comes to release and deliver
  My soul in its uttermost need;
Whose breath is the perfume of Parma
  In seasons of dulness and drouth,
Who puts with imperative charm a
    New song in my mouth?

To the form that is elfin and fragile
  And slightly defective of lung,—
To the limbs that are lusty and agile
  As is the opossum, when young,—
I have bowed, I have bent, as in duty,
  Unnumbered and dolorous knees,
But my heart never burst for a beauty
    Distinctly obese.

Yet here, I am told, is a topic
  Inviting the bibulous bard,
Like a well in the waste of a tropic,
  Whose price is as precious as nard;

The report of that pearly oasis
  Ah, had I but earlier known,
I had sung long ago of her graces,
    Sweet seventeen stone!

Though her figure be other than airy,
  Though its "note" be the largeness of earth,
Yet her temper is that of a fairy
  Addicted to methods of mirth;
Exuding a natural joyance,
  Her jests have an infinite scope,
And in bathing she bobs with the buoyance
    Of somebody's Soap.

By the calm of her weight that is welter
  Immune from the menace of shock,
In her shade half a dozen may shelter
  As under the lee of a rock;
There is that in her mountainous motion,
  A force elementally free,
Which recalls to a student of Ocean
    The surge of the sea.

In the glow that her presence diffuses
  She fares as a favourite guest;
Her pyramidal structure excuses
  What licence would ruin the rest;
No rivals, for Nature has built her
  Compact of the substance of ten,
Would suspect her of pounding a philtre
    For stealing their men.

She is set with her face to the horses,
  She flops in the roomiest chair,
And her bed, as a matter of course, is
  A twin of the wonder of Ware;
They allow her the lengthiest tether,
  Her lines are in Benjamin's lot,
And she says what occurs to her, whether
    They like it or not.

O profuse and imposing and passive,
  O dame of the devious waist,
Whose circuit, amorphous and massive,
  These arms could have never embraced,
You may puff, it is true, like a porpoise,
  And heave like a wallowing hulk,
Yet your heart is as big as your corpus,
    Our Lady of Bulk!

CEDANT ARMA TOGÆ?

[From a German Ministerial decree: "Soldiers who hesitate to kill or wound offending civilians are unworthy to wear their uniforms, and render themselves liable to imprisonment." This decree is intended to emphasize the fundamental idea in German militarism that military men are a class of society far superior to civilians. The following lines are respectfully placed in the lips of the German Minister of War.]

Pride of the Fatherland! Superb police,
  Whose business is to keep in constant fettle,
Be it not said the rust of slothful peace
  Has paralysed your military mettle;
Prove that a courage equal to the best
Still agitates the Teuton's mailèd chest.

You cannot always wallow in a sea
  Of Gallic gore, or bulge with heathen booty;
The Watch upon the Rhine or else the Spree
  Entails a homely round of bloodless duty;
But, while the counter-jumper walks the streets,
Scope should be surely found for martial feats.

There is a vicious habit, so we hear,
  Which Army men are very rightly shocked at,
Of showing disregard for warlike gear—
  The Captain's corset and the General's cocked-hat;
Men do not sink their dazzled eyes and faint
Before the warrior in his awful paint.

Yet, as the Brahman has his holy cow,
  Or the primeval Hottentot his totem,
Two things there are to which we Germans bow
  (Almost too widely known for me to quote 'em),
Two Faiths, our final stay in stress and storm—
The Kaiser and the Kaiser's uniform.

And shall a man of mere commercial breed,
  Lacking the elements of true gentility,
Pass in his homespun cloth or rustic tweed
  Unchallenged 'twixt the wind and your nobility?
Not while you wear a sabre at your side
With which to perforate his paltry hide!

Should such an one (to take a common case),
  Emboldened by excessive bouts of Munich
In some beer-garden which you deign to grace,
  Brush disrespectfully against your tunic,
Or soil your Blüchers with civilian mud—
Out with your instant blade and have his blood!

Unter den Linden, when the sun is low,
  And, in a leisure hour exempt from drilling,
With rigid gait and clanking spurs you go,
  A dream of godlike beauty, simply killing,
If any knave disputes the path you tread,
Your falchion should at once remove his head.

Noblesse, of course, *oblige*. You mustn't trail
  Your sabre-tache for vulgar churls to step on,
But seize occasion and you cannot fail
  To find the man you want to flesh your weapon;
Should he (unarmed, for choice) provoke the strife,
Why, then your course is clear; you take his life!

Let not a low civilian wipe the eye
  Of but "a single Pomeranian Grenadier;"
Rather let Art, with Laws and Learning, die—
  Pursuits to which the meaner types of men adhere;
I'd sooner even dislocate our Trade
Than let the Army's honour be mislaid.

That honour it is yours to guard unstained,
  Burnished as though by frequent use of emery,
Keeping our glorious record well maintained,
  Just as our mighty Lord of blessed memory,
The ne'er-to-be-forgotten William One,
Would, were he living, like to see it done.

TO CHRISTINE

A Quinquennial Address from her Uncle.

My dear, when you were half your age,
  (2's into 10?) a good while back,
I wrote about you on a page
  Of *Mr. Punch's* Almanack.

How you are gaining on me quick!
  Your years were then $\frac{1}{8}$ of mine,
But Time, who does arithmetic,
  Has made the ratio 2 to 9!

And now that o'er your shining head
  This second lustre (if you know
What lustres are) has been and fled
  Into the Land of Longago—

And since you somehow failed to get
  Those earlier verses off by heart
I'll make you up another set.
  So that's the Preface. Here we start.

Dear, as I see you nice and small,
  Agile of leg and sound of lung,
And rather wistfully recall
  What it was like to feel so young,

When grown-ups seemed, in taste and size,
  Removed from me immensely far—
I often ask with vague surmise
  How old you think we really are.

Sometimes I fancy you behave
  As if you found us past repair—
One foot already in the grave,
  The other very nearly there!

Then you are wrong, and you must try
  To take a more enlightened view;
You're not so much more young than I,
  Nor I so much more old than you.

For, though you have the supple joints
  That go so well with childhood's mirth,
In certain elemental points
  You are the age of Mother Earth.

And while it's true I've ceased to hop
  Out of my bed at peep of dawn,
Have lost the weasel's power to pop,
  Nor can outrun the light-foot fawn,

Yet otherwise I'm far from old;
  The words I use, so long and queer,
My manner, stern, abrupt, and cold—
  All this is just pretence, my dear.

As when you act your nursery plays,
  And ape your elders' talk and looks,
So I have copied grown-up ways
  Either from life or else from books.

But in my heart, its hopes and fears,
  Its need of love, its faith in men,
I yet may be, for all my years,
  As young as little girls of ten.

HUMOURS OF AN ENGLISH SUMMER

" Have you forgotten, love, so soon
That day, that filthy day, in June? "
Drawing-room Ballad.

" Wait, little flutterer, till June is come!"
(Thus I addressed my panting heart in Spring);
" Wait till the full-fledged woodlands fairly hum
With tuny birds and beetles on the wing;
Then by the river's marge, inside a bower
Latticed to let the blue sky gleam above,
I'd have you pluck the psychologic hour,
And ventilate your love."

Bilious with joy deferred, at last, at last,
I fixed for early June a trysting-place
(Down Taplow way) familiar from a past
Chequered with lively memories of the chase;
Nor had the interval of tarrying hopes
Been wholly wasted; I'd improved the time
Learning my words—a string of sunny tropes
Drawn from the season's prime.

The fateful day arrived—a perfect beast,
  Worthy of March when at his lion's tricks.
Dawn, rosy-nosed (the wind was Nor'-Nor'-East),
  Ushered a temperature of 46°.
Through icy rain descending like the plague,
  Close-furled in Jaeger wool and mackintosh,
Yet whistling "*Doch die Liebe fand den Weg*,"
    I sallied forth—splosh, splosh.

We met; we slithered down the oozy bank;
  Like a stuck pig the sodden rowlocks screamed;
Her steering, always poor, was simply rank,
  And from her picture-hat a torrent streamed;
We found the bower beneath a storm of hail,
  Songless save where a husky cuckoo crowed;
And once I thought I heard a nightingale
    Curse in the Doric mode.

We crouched below a straining copper beech,
  Munching from time to time a camphor pill;
And when I touched on love my flowers of speech
  Drooped in an atmosphere forlornly chill;
I cannot blame her answer, which was blunt—
  Cold feet will thus affect the nicest girl;
Besides, the damp had disarranged her "front,"
    Putting it out of curl.

* * * * *

That night, alone before a blazing log,
  And curtained from the cruel leaden skies,
I thanked my stars, above the steaming grog,
  For that fiasco which had made me wise;
"Give me no mere fair-weather wife," I said,
  "But something like a rock that's roughly hewn,
To face with careless front the coarse, ill bred,
  Jibes of an English June."

THE SEAMY SIDE OF MOTLEY

Lady, when we sat together,
  And your flow of talk that turned
On the Park, the Play, the Weather,
  Left me frankly unconcerned,
I could see how hard you labour'd
  Till your brain was stiff and sore,
Never having yet been neighbour'd
      By so dull a bore.

Later on, from information
  Gathered elsewhere after lunch,
You had got at my vocation,
  Learned that I belonged to *Punch*,
And in tones of milk and honey
  You invited me to speak
On the art of being funny,
      Funny once a week.

'Tis a task that haunts me waking,
  Like a vampire on the chest,
Spoils my peace, prevents my taking
  Joyance in another's jest;
Makes me move abroad distracted,
  Trailing speculative feet;
Makes me wear at home a rack'd head
      In a dripping sheet.

Women hint that I am blinded
  To their chaste, but obvious, charms;
Sportsmen deem me absent-minded
  When addressed to feats of arms:
If the sudden partridge rises
  I but rend the neighbouring air,
And the rabbit's rude surprises
    Take me unaware.

Life for me's no game of skittles
  As at first you might opine;
I have lost my love of victuals
  And a pretty taste in wine;
When at lunch your talk was wasted,
  Did you notice what occurred,—
How I left the hock untasted,
    How I passed the bird?

So, if you would grant a favour,
  In your orisons recall
One whose smile could scarce be graver
  If his mouth were full of gall;
Let your lips (that shame the ruby)
  Pray for mine all wan and bleak
With the strain of trying to be
    Funny every week.

OF TOP-DRESSING

"Cui flavam religas comam?"

Betty, I have it in my honest heart
To let you know with what a pure compassion
I see you tire your head (and deem it smart)
In the flamboyant mode approved by Fashion—
Something between
A stuffy turban and a tambourine.

Is it because few women dare defy
The other women's tyrannous dictation?
Or that you hope to melt some manly eye
And wring therefrom the sort of adoration
That innocent souls
Offer to angels in their aureoles?

If that's your object, I am not aware
Who is the guileless youth, the verdant stripling,
For whom you bind your sheaves of mellow hair
By processes of artificial rippling,
Using a frame
With borrowed fluff to overlay the same.

It cannot be for me; for middle age
  Leaves me, to such allurements, cool—or coolish;
It must be someone else, less timely sage,
  More simple, more impressionably foolish;
    Some one (or two?)
  Unskilled to doubt you genuine through and through.

Yet, if you care to hear the candid truth,
  From one who still preserves a sentient fraction
Of what has been a heart that in its youth
  Thrilled to the best capillary attraction—
    I can't admire
  These bulging haloes rigged on padded wire.

It's not as if your hair was in decline,
  Nor do you need to have your head diminished,
Or to obscure a scalp of poor design
  Which Nature roughly blocked and left unfinished;
    I've always said
  You had a rather nicely modelled head.

But that portentous bulk above your brow
  Makes all the rest beneath seem small and petty,
Especially your brains; and anyhow—
  To be sincere (you wish me, don't you Betty,
    To be sincere?)—
  Brains aren't your strongest feature, are they, dear?

A POLICE TRAP;

Or, The Renewal of Youth

"Open her out!" my host had said;
  And on the instant word
The mobile monster flew ahead
  Like a prodigious bird.

Her thirsty throttle, gaping free,
  Drank up the way like wine;
I almost felt that I must be
  Upon the Chatham line.

From time to time she touched the earth
  And pulverised its crust,
And I remarked, with impious mirth:
  "We too shall soon be dust!"

Far off the cyclist heard our hoot,
  And fell into the ditch;
We scattered man and fowl and brute,
  Scarce seeing which was which.

Their curses followed, choked with grit,
  While I, who paid no heed,
Composed a humorous song (or fytte)
  Largely in praise of Speed.

* * * * *

A sudden whistle rent the air!
  Instinctively she stopped,
For at the signal from his lair
  A stealthy peeler popped.

As one whose joy comes doubly sweet
  From triumph's long delay,
Slowly and trailing tedious feet
  He moved upon his prey.

There sat we waiting, trapped and dumb,
  And eyed that awful X
Like rabbits when the snarers come
  To wring their little necks.

Two more arrived; their clothes were plain;
  One from his hedge-row bower
Had timed us going like a train
  At fifty miles an hour.

I looked the liar in the face.
  Fearless of fine or quad,
"I should myself have put the pace,"
  Said I, "at eighty odd!"

And then, as in a general hush
  They took the chauffeur's name,
Over my cheeks there stole the blush
  Of pleasurable shame.

I saw my truant childhood's years
  In memory's vision rise,
And lo! the happy, happy tears
  Coursed from my goggled eyes.

How long it seemed since I was whacked
  For trespass! ah, how long
Since I was taken in the act
  Of doing something wrong!

Copper, my thanks! Through you I know
  Once more those fearful joys
Which the Olympian gods bestow
  On lawless little boys!

TO A FORTUNATE BABE

To whom, however, One Great Gift has been denied.

Infant, whose orbs—the blue of bluest china—
  Scan with a like dispassionate regard
Your toys, your Christmas-tree, your dolly Dinah,
    And me, the motley bard;

Little you dream (nor could it be expected
  Of one so innocent, so freshly green)
How near—had history's course a shade deflected—
    Our kinship might have been.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was younger,
  And wore a figure less maturely blown,
I loved your Granny with a wasting hunger
    That gnawed me to the bone.

She was a girl of more than common merit;
  When I would jest she smiled from ear to ear;
Also she promised shortly to inherit
    £5,000 a year.

Judging from well-directed sighs and glances
(Mute testimonials), I deemed that she
Deftly reciprocated my advances;
But—it was not to be!

Her captious father clumsily collided
With our arrangements, castled high in air;
Without consulting me, the brute decided
That I must woo elsewhere.

I thought to drown myself, but Heaven stayed me,
No river being handy but the Cam;
Therefore instead I took an oath that made me
The celibate I am.

My lady did the like, but hers was broken;
She wed Another One—I can't think how;
And you are here to-day, a living token
Of Granny's fractured vow.

Infant, I blame you not at all, nor grudge it,
Though fair the gale that on your future blows,
Promising health and beauty and a budget
Rosy as your own toes.

And yet, whatever favour Fortune's hand adds,
One grace you lack that must be missing still:
You might have counted me among your Grandads—
And now you never will.

ARMS AND THE WOMAN

[The two following themes do not represent the author's own views or experience, but those of a person of strong anti-militarist tendencies.]

I.—Seeing Red.

Though I am not so young as then,
  I still remember rather well
The first (and last) occasion when
  I disapproved of Asphodel ;
But so it is with love at sight
  That later on—some idle morning—
In breaks a sudden stream of light
  Without the faintest previous warning.

We are so easily misled !
  I judged of her by outward looks
As one who would not lose her head
  To heroes out of story-books ;
Her name, although a little rare,
  Lent me no hint that might alarm me,
Nor could I guess her pensive air
  Concealed a passion for the Army.

(Mind you, I like the soldier-class,
  I count them modest, frank and plain ;
In their companionship I pass
  Moments aloof from mental strain ;

But there's a courage which can be
  Tested without a bloody quarrel;
This nobler kind occurs in me,
  And may be best described as "moral.")

It chanced, upon a dismal day,
  We studied photographic views,
Mycenæ's walls—the Appian Way—
  The haunt of Umbria's famed recluse;
Was it the cypress, lone and stark,
  Standing as sentry o'er Assisi,
That wrung from her this raw remark:
  "Wouldn't you *love* to win the V.C.?"

Somehow it seemed in doubtful taste
  That, when I hoped her heart was stirred
By thoughts of how St. Francis traced
  Kinship with beast and flower and bird,
Taming his flesh until it shone
  With a refined and ghostly pallor—
She should invite opinions on
  A copper prize for carnal Valour!

I answered her. My tones were bland,
  And yet perhaps the words were hard;
But anyone will understand
  About my feelings being jarred;
I said, "Let nursery-maids adore
  A medal sewn on crude vermilion;
I woo not such, nor ever soar
  To virtues other than civilian!"

And then my thoughts went back to one
Who from his wisdom dropped this pearl:
Should you propose to wed, my son,
Beware the Guardsman type of girl!
'Twas Heaven revived that warning voice,
And, as I closed our painful session,
I knew that I had made the choice
Of Valour's better part—Discretion!

II.—THE LADIES' CAVALRY CLUB.

It was a solemn *séance* composed of martial dames,
Discussing likely candidates with military claims;
The doors were doubly bolted; but, through a little bird,
I am enabled to report exactly what occurred.

The Amazon presiding over the lists of Mars
Was Lady Susan Cropper, of the Eighty-eighth Hussars,
And she had just put forward the name of Bella Squeers,
Third cousin to a captain in "The Bounding Buccaneers."

Then spoke a Horse Guard's lady, a welter-weight was she,
And rode her husband's chargers to hounds at sixteen-three:

"I ask for information; pray, *who* is 'Bella Squeers'?
And *who*, by all that's holy, are 'The Bounding Buccaneers'?

"Cavalry of the Line I know; one meets them here and there;"
("*The Liner she's a lady!*" observed the angry Chair);
"But if you mean to keep select you simply *can't* allow
The claims of fancy regiments raised Heaven alone knows how!"

At this a stout Yeowoman repressed a rising sob,
And called the previous speaker a horrid, horrid snob;
And said that, if the Junior Arm should fail to get its dues,
Herself would bar all candidates related to the Blues.

Dare I describe the issue, what language rent the air,
What sudden transformations took place in people's hair,
Or how a West Kent's aunt-in-law had both her *pince-nez* broke,
And something awful happened to a Kitchen Lancer's toque?

A Colonel's wife ("The Dye-hards") betrayed a natural piqué
On being drenched with coffee all down her dexter cheek,
And, though of temperate habits and never known to faint,
Swore frankly like a trooper, and swooned from loss of paint.

I shrink to estimate the cost in limb and even life,
Had not a nervous member screamed, "I disapprove of strife;
Stop! or I fetch my father, a noted man of gore,
Experienced in handling a 'Gyppy' Camel Corps!"

* * * * *

Great peace ensued. They kissed again, like dear mock-turtle doves,
Household and Line and Yeomanry, and called each other "loves";
And by unanimous consent elected Bella Squeers,
Third cousin to a captain in "The Bounding Buccaneers."

A SMART SET-BACK

[Lord Crewe, in referring publicly to the so-called "Smart Set," said that he had never succeeded in "identifying the members of that sinister association."]

Long ago, the sport of vain ambition,
  I had nursed a secret whim
For establishing a firm position
  Dans le mouvement (in the swim);
I had had my high and eager heart set
  On the grandest prize of all,
On a close communion with the Smart Set,
  On a place, however small,
'Mid the heroes and the heroines of the upper
    servants' hall.

Poring over my patrician papers,
  Packed with many a purple plum,
I had read about their week-end capers,
  And the things they made to hum;
I had heard of priceless goods and chattels
  Cheerfully reduced to hay;
Heard of how they fought in bolster-battles,
  Took the staircase on a tray,
And in fact were rather wicked in a reckless sort
    of way.

And the thought would make my bosom flutter
  With desire of "seeing life,"
With the lust of laying slides of butter
  For the Worldling and his Wife;

But alas! I knew no country houses
  Where my hostess left us free
To indulge in these refined carouses,
  And the fear occurred to me:
"Shall I never then contribute to the vogue of
    Bernard V.!

"Shall my aim in life be wholly wasted!
  Shall they say, when I am dead,
'There he lies, poor worm, who never tasted
  Of the wine when it was red;
Never drenched his partner's frock with soda,
  Never took a manly part
In a bout of booby-traps, or showed a
  Trace of true creative Art;
In a word, to put it broadly, he was never really
    smart!'"

Yet there's one who, haply being jealous
  Of a so exclusive ring,
Mocks the Smart Set, has the face to tell us
  He suspects there's no such thing;
And I find a certain consolation
  In his bold agnostic view
Of that "sinister association,"
  And I think, my lord of Crewe,
I will be content remaining well outside the pale
    —with you.

A NEW PROFESSION

Or, What to do with our Sons?

My hopeless boy! when I compare
  (Claiming a father's right to do so)
Your hollow brain, your vacuous air,
With all the time, and wealth and care
  Lavished upon your mental trousseau;

Over my waistcoat's ample pit
  This ravening grief holds constant session—
That through a total lack of wit
You are deplorably unfit
  To follow any known profession.

No tutelary genius shone
  About your scalp in school or college;
Therefore you cannot be a Don,
Or anything reposing on
  A fundamental plinth of knowledge.

You never nursed the godlike spark
  That kindles men to serve the nation;
I trow that, as a Treasury clerk,
You never could have made your mark
  Or even earned a decoration.

The medical prelim. would mar
  Your hopes of making healthy men sick;
And, as for practice at the Bar,
Your gifts—I don't know what they are,
  But know, at least, they're not forensic.

You might, by steady cram, aspire
  To dodge the test of martial duty;
But you have shown no keen desire
To face the pom-pom's withering fire,
  And die for Haldane, Home and Beauty.

Remains the Church, where you might seek
  A paltry income from the pew-rate;
Yet here, again, I find you weak
In certain graces, such as Greek,
  That go to make the perfect curate.

Still, there's the chauff— What's that I hear?
  You wish to say that, thanks to Heaven, you
Have found a suitable career
At some £300 a year
  Drawn from a grateful country's revenue?

My credulous son! Your faith would break
  The records of the Middle Ages!
Skilled work, and past your wits to fake,
Needs must he do who means to make
  Six of the best in weekly wages!

What's that? The House intends to treat
  Its private self to public payment?
Eventually hopes to meet,
By saving money on the Fleet,
  Its bills for bed and board and raiment?

Embrace me, boy! I felt afraid
  That you would never find your mission;
You knew no sort of craft or trade,
But here's your *métier* ready-made!
  You shall become a Politician!

My hopes for you, preposterous oaf,
  Were ashes; now to flame you fan 'em;
No need to toil or spin or chauff
When you can comfortably loaf,
  And touch £300 *per annum.*

Embrace your father! You shall see
  How well the prospect serves to stem his fear
He'll stand his son the entrance fee,
And you shall join, a paid M.P.,
  The finest Club in either hemisphere.

ENCORE LE MONDE OÙ L'ON S'AFFICHE

["Mrs. —— is giving a little dinner for the Countess of ——'s dance."]

Scanning the paper with my morning coffee—
  Such mental food as "Bargains at the Sales,"
"Birrell's Dilemma," "Eagle Choked by Toffee,"
  "The Quake of Earth in Gallant Little Wales,"
"The Wrongs of Suffragettes, and How to Right 'em,"
  "Tragedy on a Cliff—the Fatal Shove,"
I came upon the really poignant item
    Recorded just above.

Madam, I had not guessed your social station,
  Nor even learned your name before to-day;
The loss was mine; I suffered that privation
  With simple fortitude as brave men may;
Until your paragraph, perused this morning,
  Lit up the nescient gloom in which I sat,
I had received no hint, no sort of warning,
    That you would dine like that.

'Tis not the vulgar cost of wine and victual
  That makes, of such a meal, a world-event;
The dinner, modestly described as "little,"
  Would not demand this bold advertisement;
It is the sequent ball that craves recital,
  The noble house to which your guests will go—
That is the salient matter, *that* the vital
    Thing for us all to know.

And now we know it; and to this instruction,
  For which a grateful public thanks you much,
Each of us adds the obvious deduction
  That it has cost you, say, a guinea touch.
The earthquake, and the eagle (*rapta fatis*)
  Whose toffee-surfeit everyone deplores,
Get their advertisement for nothing (gratis);
    You had to pay for yours!

THE WEARING OF THE WHISKER

A Bare-Faced Retort.

[*The Lady* has been informed that "woman's admiration for the man with the clean-shaven face is waning, and that a revival of the detestable moustache is imminent." "If it is really true," says *The Lady*, "I hope it will not stop at the moustache. Whiskers have not been worn for thirty years, and they could be made quite dandified and D'Orsayish if reintroduced."]

Not for myself the horror when I hear
  Of this insensate freak of mobile Fashion;
I have been shaved, clean-shaved, this many
    a year,
  And still propose to cut the frequent gash on
    My patient face, nor grow
  Side trimmings or a rude moustachio.

Woman (whose tastes I never had the tongue
  Rightly to chant, nor yet the wit to follow)
May choose to let her fingers sport among
  The facial growths of some unshorn Apollo,
    Trained like the ampelopsis,
  That happy haunt of woolly bears and wopses:—

Woman, I say, her Paradise may seek
  On downy lips; she may elect to risk her
Complexion up against a hairy cheek,
  Wiping its bloom away with tufts of whisker;
    And, should she so incline,
  Then that is her affair and none of mine.

My trouble is that men whom I admire,
Whose open countenances, clean as whistles,
Suggest the late Sir Joshua's angel choir,
May join the mode and take to rearing bristles,
And thus could never be
The same, ah! never more the same, to me!

If Asquith, say, were snared in Fashion's net,
And (coarsely speaking) chucked the legal type up,
And, to appease the ardent suffragette,
Assumed the shaggy semblance of a Skye-pup,
I could not well be mute,
And lightly bear to see him so hirsute.

I think the spectacle would drive me mad
Should Winston's cherub cheeks be flanked with "weepers,"
Or Birrell to his mutton cutlets add
A supplemental pair of pendent creepers,
The kind that might recall
Wistaria hanging from a cottage wall.

Or what if Morley fledged his lips with fluff,
To captivate some Oriental peri!
Or Edward Grey, exchanging smooth for rough,
Developed droopers like my *Lord Dundreary*,
And in the dubious dark
Confused himself with Whiskerandos Clarke!

But worst, if Haldane (hairless heretofore),
  Assisting William to review his batteries,
And keen to compliment that Lord of War
  By imitation, most sincere of flatteries,
        Should wear, for England's sake,
  Moustaches of the best Imperial make ! !

OF TAME LIONS

Verses composed on the Kalends of March.

Month of the Winds that, like the royal beast
  When on his prey he pounces to annex it,
Should strictly enter raging from the East
  And having finished make a lamb-like exit;

Why have you not arrived in rampant mood,
  As Afric's monarch hurtles through the jungle?
Can there have been some inexactitude,
  Some silly meteorologic bungle?

We were to hide our heads from your attack,
  But these are dulcet airs that softly stroke us,—
Zephyrs, not mentioned in the almanack,
  Nor contemplated by the crescent crocus.

That harbinger of Spring, by lawn and glade,
  That looked to see you in your Lion's habit,
Laughs in your face and feels much less afraid
  Than had you been a small domestic rabbit!

What have you done to lose your strength and speed?
  Have the rheumatics made your tawny flank ache?
Or was it Shrovetide's undigested feed
  That left you torpid from excess of pancake?

I do suspect this last. And here I find
  Another Lion has in you a symbol
Of its own self—I mean the British kind,
  Once so superbly muscular and nimble.

He, too, has overstrained his powers inside,
  And to the stomach's wants so weakly pandered
That, while elsewhere the nations filch his pride,
  None comes, in cost of living, *near* his standard!

And still we raise new gastronomic shrines,
  Making a rude embarrassment of Ritzes,
Till the dull beast, outworn with meats and wines,
  Loses at last what poor remaining wit's his.

Come then, O March, put on your Martial show,
  Lest we, who have our sinews soft and flabby,
Forget how Lions look, before they grow
  Sleek as their lower type, the pampered tabby.

Month of the Winds, let loose their healthy roar!
  Call up your tonic gales from out their cavern!
Sting us to see that life is something more
  Than just a round of restaurant and tavern!

THE DECLINE OF CHIVALRY

Not of the times portrayed by Monsieur Malory,
  When, poising high in air his barber's pole,
Your lusty knight beneath the ladies' gallery
  Took a preliminary caracole,
Then went and got himself severely bruised
So as to keep the pretty dears amused ;—

Not of the period dimly pre-Quixotic
  When, wearing mail for flannel next the chest,
Heroes half gladiatorial, half erotic,
  Rode out upon the thing they called a Quest ;—
Not of those days I speak, for I have read
How that Cervantes, cynic, killed them dead.

I speak of other times and other morals,
  An age of Tin replacing that of Steel,
When Chivalry declines to hunt for laurels
  By charging ponderously, spur at heel,
On deeds of high emprise down Piccadilly
(Unless it wants to look supremely silly).

Doubtless the better sort would gladly nourish
  Those notions which occur in Arthur's tale ;
Doubtless Romance might still contrive to flourish,
  Changing its knightly for its Daily Mail,
If Woman would but give our modern gallants
A livelier chance to demonstrate their talents.

They sigh for service; they would gladly wrestle
  With horrid dragons or a heathen crew;
Ride *ventre-à-terre* to help the weaker vessel,
  Behaving just as Lancelot used to do;
Only you cannot keep it up much longer
When once the weaker sex becomes the stronger.

With nothing left to learn (outside the nursery),
  These types of self-contained and virile strength,
Have they, I ask you—kindly take a cursory
  Glance at their pictured shapes, three-quarters length,
Exposed, for sixpence, in the social Press—
Have they the air of ladies in distress?

Believe me, Woman's skin in not so tender;
  She knows, as well as you, her way about;
Why offer, then, your arm as her defender
  When she can manage nicely, thanks, without?
Why sacrifice your seat in trains or pews,
When she can chuck you from it, should she choose?

And, since the creatures we were taught to cherish
  Cease to comply with Nature's holy plan,
If the old Chivalry should shortly perish
  Let none that finds it murdered blame the man;
But write this epitaph for its demise:
Crushed by a woman's boot (men's extra size).

A FAMOUS VICTORY

AIR—*The Battle of the Baltic.*

[It is said that, in his first report to his august Master, the Admiral of the Baltic Fleet referred to his performance on the Dogger Bank as "a serious encounter."]

Of the Admiral of the Tsar
Sing the North Sea night's renown,
When that gallant Tartar tar
Toward the Dogger drifted down,
Heading cautiously and slow for the South;
Full of thankful wonder at
His escape from Kattegat,
And his heart still pit-a-pat
In his mouth.

Cautiously he felt his way
Where the snares were sure to be,
Turning darkness into day
With his lights that searched the sea,
For his Teuton friends had said, "Have a fear!
Where the British trawlers ride,
You are certain to collide
With a foe the other side
Of the sphere."

Ay! beneath the stars' eclipse
Who could say what levin-cracks
Might explode from battleships
In the guise of simple smacks,
What infernal submarine booby-trap,
Masked as mackerel or as sole,
Or a porpoise on the roll,
Might contrive to blow a hole
In his scrap?

Hark! the sudden cry outrang:
Hostile trawling fleet ahead!
And each rustic lubber sprang
Like a rocket from his bed,
And prepared to meet his doom, face to face;
And across the dazzled night
They could see this dreadful sight—
Fishers by a greenish light
Gutting plaice!

Then the Admiral swore an oath,
And the word went down the line,
And the captains, nothing loth,
Read the flaring battle-sign,
And they took its meaning in at a glance;
"Hearts of Oak! your duty's plain;
Lay your guns," they cried, "in train;
You may never get again
Such a chance!"

Then the cannon belched their shot,
And the warriors grew more bold,
And the sport more fast and hot,
When they heard no thunder rolled
Back in answer from the dumb-stricken foe;
Till aloud the landsmen laughed
As they watched the helpless craft,
Raked and riddled, fore and aft,
Blow on blow.

But at length their task was through,
And the gunners stood at ease,
And they left each shattered crew
To the mercy of the seas,
Where Destruction walked with Death on the
wave;
And the Admiral, much impressed,
Flashed the signal: *God be blest!*
Pin a medal on the breast
Of the brave!

So the fight with odds was won,
And the victors went their ways,
Flushed with duty nobly done
To the glory and the praise
Of the majesty and might of the Tsar;
Till their fame arrived, one day,
Where a British squadron lay
Somewhere near thy noted bay,
Trafalgar!

TO A LOST BACHELOR

Thomas, my friend, we live in stirring times
  Which to the poet make profound appeal,
And yet to-day I must direct my rhymes
  To what concerns my more immediate weal;
For I have learned but now—and oh! the shock
  Has made my faith in humankind miscarry—
That you, on whom I rested like a rock,
  Thomas, that you—that you intend to marry!

Had any other told this sorry tale
  I would have thrust the libel down his throat,
Saying, "His spots the leopard cannot pale,
  Nor yet the Æthiop shed his native coat!"
But you yourself conveyed the damning news,
  And, though you wore an air of wild elation,
Babbling a jargon such as infants use,
  'Twas clear you spoke from first-class information.

Others, I own, had dashed my faith ere now,
  But such were slackers, groggy at the knee,
Not built to brave the mountain's arduous brow
  With stalwart veterans like you and me;
A dwindling band, we've been and watched them wed,
  And in the festal pew I still can see you
Wearing funereal garb, with shaking head
  And lips that groaned (in Latin) "*Eheu! Eheu!!*"

You had a heart, I hoped, of sterner bent;
  Gifts of imagination kept you right;
You would not take the primrose path's descent,
  So facile and so desperately trite;
And now "*la belle dame*" holds you too in thrall,
  You too in turn have loosely drifted from me;
This is the most disloyal lapse of all,
  And warrants my remarking "*Et tu, Tommy!*"

Don't tell me how our ties will just extend,
  Not break, through such a change — I've
    thought of that;—
That wives adopt their husband's dearest friend,
  Much like a fixture when you take a flat;
Contrariwise I'm certain she will cast
  A jealous eye on me; it *must* upset her
To know I know so much about your past
  From those nomadic days before you met her.

Therefore, my Thomas, since we two must part,
  I post you, privily, these farewell lines,
Where pity more than anger moves my heart
  On this ill-omened Eve—St. Valentine's;
Pity me, too, left lonely on the shore
  Here where the tide below my stranded keel
    ebbs,
The same that lifts your prow which lately bore
  In deathless paint (you *said*) the sign of *Cœlebs*.

ALL FOOLS' EVE

Permit me to remind you, precious One,
That we (yourself and I) to-morrow wed;
And let me add, I greatly hope the sun
May shower his gold upon your golden head,
To hint that Heaven above
Smiles on my happy choice of All Fools' Day, my love.

You may remember why I chose a date
For which your female heart found no excuse;
I had a human motive, dearest Kate:
My kindly object was to introduce
An element of mirth
Into the dullest ceremony known on earth.

For fear our friends might count the thing a bore
With no redeeming hitch to raise a laugh
(As when the ring gets loose and takes the floor),
I fixed a day that offered scope for chaff;
Allusions made to folly
Might help, I thought, to mitigate their melancholy.

You will, of course, ignore such *jeux d'esprit;*
Lightly they'll glance from off your back, dear duck.
A woman who would choose a man like me
Must be a connoisseur and know her luck;
She's not a fool nor blind,
But dowered with wisdom of a most unusual kind.

Just so yourself, when I selected you
From other equally potential wives,
Approved my judgment, praised my point of view,
Regarded my request that our two lives
Should be together knitted
As quite the soundest act I ever yet committed.

Surely there never was a pair so wise.
And when the others, in their humorous way,
Babble of motley as our fitting guise,
We'll know the facts, and let them have their day,
Their one day in the year,
Poor fools, who haven't married you or me, my dear.

TO ENGLAND IN 1908

Dedicated to the author of "Forty Singing Seamen," by one of them.

[The following verses are modelled on the metrical scheme of a poem by Mr. Alfred Noyes entitled "To England in 1907; a Prayer that she might speak for Peace." For those (if any) who have never read this fine outburst of optimism, a brief quotation may serve to illustrate Mr. Noyes's motive and method.

"The poor and weak uplift their manacled hands
To thee, our Mother, our Lady and Queen of lands:
Anguished in prayer before thy footstool stands
Peace, with her white wings glimmering o'er the sea.

Others may shrink whose naked frontiers face
A million foemen of an alien race;
But thou, Imperial, by thy pride of place
O, canst thou falter or fear to set them free?

* * * * * *

Speak, speak and act! The sceptre is in thy hand;
Proclaim the reign of love from land to land;
Then come the world against thee, thou shalt stand!
Speak, with the world-wide voice of thine own sea."]

Now, England, stretch the dismal pall above
The dead year's hopes of universal love
While to her ark returns the futile dove
Disconsolate o'er the grey diluvial sea.

This was that year of Conference at the Hague,
And the results I find extremely vague;
Rumours of War still raven like the plague,
And still Bellona goes it strong and free.

I bade you speak for Peace, and speak you did,
Trying your best to do as you were bid—
Waste words as when a cuttle-fish (or squid)
  Mottles with squirted ink the indifferent sea.

Did you not promise in the open Press
To build no fewer than one ship the less
If they, the Powers, would sign a joint address
  Making the entrance to Millennium free?

None with a like authority could speak.
You are an island; you are thus unique;
Safe as a cert behind your narrow streak
  Consisting, all the way, of sundering sea.

Some folk have frontiers—always such a bore;
It means a slavish lust for local gore;
But you, with Ocean's barrier round your shore,
  Imbibed at birth the trick of being free.

By land, as on the brine, you take the lead;
Your patriot heirs are bred of manhood's breed,
Each one (*per cent.*) prepared to die at need
  Rather than lose his grip upon the sea.

Yet, England, what availed your wistful cry?
Judge, if you please, by Germany's mute reply:
She lays her keels regardless—we know why:—
  To jump our claim to set the nations free.

And shall we hear that menacing voice dictate
Liberty's terms within our seaward gate?
Let nineteen-seven go! Here 's nineteen-eight!
  We'll teach them who 's entitled to the sea!

You, as I said before (and say again,
For fear the rest should fail to read it plain),
Have the sole right, as Mistress of the Main,
  Will they or nill, to say they *shall* be free.

Enough of words. Build *Dreadnoughts* two to one;
And let your children, every mother's son,
Shoulder the rifle, prime the rakish gun,
  And fling this shattering challenge o'er the sea:—

"'Tis ours to stamp the world with Freedom's brand!
Love us, or we will blow you out of hand
Into a shapeless pulp. So understand,
  We mean, this way or that, to make you free!"

Thus shall the reign of Peace be shortly due,
Based on a general funk, superbly blue,
Or else because there's no one left but you
  Upon an otherwise unpeopled sea.

THE TURNING OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS WORM

[The "Middle-Class Serf," who is taxed and rated and bled beyond endurance "in the interests of the most pampered section of the community—the labouring man," is now, it seems, in revolt, and is forming a new political body on the lines of the Labour Party in order to obtain justice and recognition.]

What are these voices floating on the Springtide,
  Blent with the clank of chains,
Poignant as when a sea-mew, with his wing tied,
  Frets for the ocean's plains;
Not loud and coarse, but doleful, but *adagio*,
  As fits Refinement, even in decay,
There in its villa aptly styled "Bellaggio,"
    Down Brixton way?

I know that cry, that stifled cry for freedom!
  I know that weary wail!
It is the Middle Class with none to heed 'em,
  Except *The Daily Mail;*
It is the type of whom the word was written
  That proves the pen more potent than the sword:
"These constitute the heart, the brains, of Britain,
    Its spinal cord."

The clerk, the journalist, the man of letters,
  Of medicine and the law—
They are condemned to wear ignoble fetters,
  And lie on planks and straw;
Daintily bred, they have their bodies branded
  With marks that ought to make our bosoms boil;
They are the slaves of so-called horny-handed
    Scions of toil.

Bled (to oblige his lord) of hard-won wages,
  The wretched drudge provides
Free schools and meals, free baths and free old-ages,
  And Lord knows what besides;
Until a brain of once superb dimensions
  At last collapses, and the poor dull slave
Gets, while his tyrants pouch their annual pensions,
    A pauper's grave!

England, be warned! The time for patience passes;
  You are more near the eve
Of a revolt among the Middle Classes
  Than you perhaps believe;
Worn to a thread by Labour's licensed plunder
  Of what poor desultory pay they earn,
Can anybody reasonably wonder
  These worms should turn?

We can but dimly guess what that contortion
  Will in effect be like,
For none has even seen the brainy portion
  Of England go on strike;
This much is sure—or I've miscalculated—
  It will recall Athena's maiden *rôle*,
When she emerged, in armour fully plated,
    From Zeus's poll.

Figure the portent! Let there be no blinking
  The dread results to be
When all our Thinking Classes give up thinking
  And strike for Liberty!
The public might endure its straitened lot if
  Most other hives of thought should cease to hum,
But what—O hideous apprehension!—what if
    The Press went dumb!

IN PRAISE OF FOG

Mysterious instrument of urban woe,
O Fog,
Weighing on palsied London like a log,
There must be something good in you, I know,
Or why does everyone abuse you so?

You veil the cheeks of beauty, that is true,
But then
You also veil some very ugly men,
And these are legion, while the fair are few,
And therefore I am much obliged to you.

Wrapt in your cloak of comfortable dark
Ninefold,
The Albert Effigy, all spruce with gold,
And poor Achilles, shivering in the Park,
Even at ten a.m. escape remark.

'Tis yours to pluck the mighty from his seat.
Yon god,
Whose car is wont to treat me like a clod,
Alights on earth to trace his bus's beat,
Not knowing Charing Cross from Regent Street.

Over the motor-fiend you cast your grim
Grey spell,
Claiming your equal right of raising hell,
Till on his own account there dawns on him
A sense of sanctity in life and limb.

Your trend is democratic. I have seen
A lord,
Driven (by you) to courses he abhorred,
Stand on the Underground, first class, between
Two seated segments of the Great Unclean.

Your vogue revives our Strephons' drooping lyres;
The skies
Ring loud to Rider Haggard's happy cries;
You come to town, and lo! the race retires
"Back to the land" that reared its rustic sires.

At Christmas-tide I could not wish you hence,
Not I,
Who gave, in lieu of gifts I failed to buy,
This fair excuse, "The Fog was too, too dense!"
Thank you for that. It saved me much expense.

Ergo, I cannot let my feelings chime,
O Fog,
With theirs who paint you black as Golliwog;
But I shall be most pleased at any time
(When matter fails) to mention you in rhyme.

NIGHT THOUGHTS OF AN ALTRUIST

[In an article under the title "How to go to Sleep," Mr. Eustace Miles, after touching on some of the more popular physical devices for inducing slumber, recommends that one should not allow one's meditations to be "self-circumferenced," but should "send out thoughts for the health of others."]

When the hours of day are ended,
  And the stars are overhead,
And your figure lies extended
  On a sanitary bed;
When you sample all specifics
  From the latest sleeping tract,
And the footling soporifics
      Fail to act;

When, to sooth the veins that beat in
  Your ebullient head, you hold
(Turn and turn about) your feet in
  Tubs of water, hot and cold;
When you irrigate your seething
  Temples with a garden hose,
Or adopt a rhythmic breathing
      Through the nose;

When you check a flock that hustles,
  Sheep by sheep, across a stile,
Or relax your facial muscles
  In a large and fatuous smile;

When you eat a raw cucumber
  With an onion sliced in oil,
Yet no faintest sign of slumber
    Crowns your toil;

When you've run through every poem
  Learned verbatim long ago,
And recalled, from Jeroboam,
  Israel's monarchs in a row;
When, in fact, you've vainly tested
  All the known hypnotic wiles,
Are you beaten, are you bested,
    Mr. Miles?

Do you rise in your pyjamas
  (Natural wool throughout) and pore
Over Ibsen's earlier dramas
  Till you ultimately snore?
Short of this, or Homer's *Iliad*
  In the undiluted Greek,
Have you else no balm in Gilead,
    So to speak?

Yes! you turn your thoughts to others
  Far beyond the selfish zone,
To a world of men and brothers
  With digestions not your own;
There your heart goes gently stealing
  (That's the true narcotic spell!)
And you trust that they are feeling
    Pretty well.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF AGE

[Not to be confused with Old-Age Pensions.]

Yes, my Septimius, you are growing old.
  Vainly you draw those lateral wisps of hair
  Across your cranium, desolately bare,
In hope to hide the summit's polished mould;
        Try as you may—and do,
      Implacably the thing shows through.

Your step is heavier; in the mazy dance
  No more you whirl the once fantastic toe;
  Sudden exertion tends to make you blow,
And fewer things in life are left to chance,
        Because your nerve resents
      The shock of unforeseen events.

Your games are those that you would then have mocked
  When Youth demanded tests of pluck and speed;
  You favour golf and croquet, where you need
Run little risk of being badly crocked;
        (Also a little chess
      Causes your body no distress).

Spring, which is apt to urge the pulse's pace,
  Merely evokes regret for springs gone by;
  No longer now your vague and virile eye
Laughs back at Beauty's challenge to the chase;
        Women indeed, as such,
      Have ceased to move you overmuch.

These are the penalties that Age involves.
  Yet are there compensations—of a kind—
  In years that bring the philosophic mind,
That teach perspective, give the sense that solves
        What is of worth, and what,
      Upon the other hand, is not.

Those passions cooled that made your judgment swerve,
  You'll read the merits clear of man and man,
  And know a patriot from a partisan,
Men such as Milner from the race they serve—
        The graceless sort that mix
      Their gratitude with mud and bricks.

And you will die, I hope, before the day
  When none is left to take his country's part
  Because she's broken every loyal heart
And killed her own by adipose decay.
        May timely death, my friend,
      Spare you the sight of such an end!

"HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD"

"O to be in England!" *&c.*

I.

When balm of Spring had turned the poet's head,
And he expressed a pious wish to share
The vernal joys of England (so he said,
Having a patriot's heart, but took good care
To live elsewhere),

I hope he meant it; I sincerely trust
That he was forced to let his feelings go
As poets do who sing because they must.
But did he? I should greatly like to know
If this was so.

Here was his chosen home, this land of flowers;
He knew her for the loveliest haunt of Spring;
He knew her vocal groves, her cypress bowers,
How they could teach our wisest thrush a thing,
Or two, to sing.

Here, well he knew it, with the breath of March,
Young Spring, the Florentine, already stirred,
Nor waited, under Italy's azure arch,
Until the swallow, that fastidious bird,
Had twice occurred.

Still, Browning's verse is his affair. For me
Viewing, on Samminiato's heights reclined,
This city made for Nature's pageantry,
I own I bear my exile with a mind
Sweetly resigned.

Threading the dusky hills that ring her round,
Where like a central gem Firenze lies,
Green Arno westering goes through storied ground
To catch their colour from the burnished skies
When the day dies.

Ah well! 'Tis hard to be from home just now;
Yet, while these airs of evening, soft and faint,
Temper the keen nostalgia in my brow,
I must endure it like a local saint
Without complaint.

Florence.

II.

Beneath a noon athirst to spend
  The night's largesse of healing dew,
Russet and grey the rocks descend
  Sheer to the sudden shoreless blue;
Blossom of almond, bloom of peach,
  From crannied ledges lean their banners,
And Nature, far as eye can reach,
  Adopts the most engaging manners.

Here, closely linked, the dancing hours
  Renew the one unwearying strain;
Each season flaunts her spoil of flowers
  Moving with jocund steps and fain;
And Winter's self, the mate of Spring,
  Checks not the feet that follow after;
And April weaves her dædal ring
  With never a tear to dim the laughter.

Man, too, where other prospects please,
  Is not, as usual, simply vile;
His lesson learnt at Nature's knees,
  He wears an *entente cordiale* smile;
I hear his happy, reckless hoot,
  I breathe his generous pungent odours,
Where all the lower Corniche Route
  Resounds with Anglo-French exploders.*

* By Tre, Pol, and Pen
Ye may know the Cornish men.—*Old Song.*

By Teuf, Hoot and Toot
Ye may know the Corniche Route.—*New Song.*

Why, then, should I desert a spot
  That makes my vagrant waistcoat thrill,
Prompting the rhymes I loosely dot
  Down on my local washing-bill?
Why quit a world whose beauty wakes
  The lyre of middle-aged Apollos,
And seek a dubious clime that breaks
  The back of disillusioned swallows?

Is it because the poet's words
  Extol the charm of British Springs
That I, with those misguided birds,
  Propose to fare on northward wings?
Is it because my spirit pines
  For London's over-rated season?
No, it is not. The following lines
  Confess a larger, loftier reason.

There is a moment (just behind
  The vernal equinox it falls)
When men of patriotic mind
  Are ware of England's voice that calls!
At once, from bower or bath or bed
  (No cost so great the heart would grudge it)
They fly, like me, to hold her head,
  And help to see her through the Budget!

Cap d'Ail.

THE SOURCE OF ENGLAND'S GREATNESS

When from distant parts returning,
  Dazed with foreign modes of talk,
And the heart within him yearning
  Towards his home's *façade* of chalk—
When at length his eye has lit on
  Dover's mole that mocks the tide
What is it that stirs the Briton
  With a throb of native pride,
Counteracting other spasms in the pit of his inside?

Does he muse: "I come from places
  Pitifully far behind
Us in all the arts and graces,
  Love of culture, breadth of mind?
Paris, Seville, Munich, Naples—
  Can their gifts with ours compare?
What have they to match with Maple's,
  Or the Halls of Leicester Square,
Or the *verve* of Carlton dinners when Ideas are in the air?"

No, he grants we may be duller
  Than the centres I have named,

Deaf to music, blind to colour,
Bare of art and unashamed;
Jeux d'esprit—we may have missed 'em,
And our play of wit be slow,
Yet he finds no second system
Whose affairs so smoothly flow
Undisturbed by those who reckon they are there
to run the show.

Other lands that view their Senates
As the fount of social law
May on their paternal tenets
Hang with unaffected awe;
We regard our Chambers' prattle
As of negligible weight,
Like the wind of schoolboy battle
In a boarding-house debate,
Full of noise but pretty certain not to compromise
the State.

Here they fight, by party faction
Torn in two or even more,
Ever seeking new distraction
In the strokes they dealt before;
While the nation, doing nicely,
Goes the way it always went,
Getting through its work precisely
As it would in the event
Of an *aposiopesis* overtaking Parliament.

That is why the homing trotter,
  Pendent o'er the steamer's side,
Feels his British heart grow hotter
  With a sense of native pride;
Out of lands whose rulers lead 'em
  By a tutelary string
He has come where ample Freedom
  Soars at large with lusty wing,
And the voice of politicians is a very little thing.

THE SECRET OF SANITY

[Lord Rosebery attributes the growth of insanity to the restlessness of modern life, and advocates as a remedy the cultivation of home and the domestic joys. In the following verses he is supposed to be addressed by one of his peers—a millionaire.]

My lord, you lately let us know
That British wits are on the wane,
Hinting at reasons why we grow
Each decade more and more insane;
And I have thought you might
Be glad to know that you have got the answer right.

The cause, in fact, is vague unrest,
The constant itch for change of air,
The pitifully feverish quest
Of things that are not here, but there,
The quaint, the quite absurd
Passion, on everybody's part, to be a bird.

And you, my lord, have rightly shown
(Speaking, as usual, like a book)
How, if we never quit our own
Peculiar hearth or ingle-nook,
This habit does a lot
Toward minimising any risk of mental rot.

That is your rule, and that is mine;
We both have learned the simple life;
On principle we both decline
The noisy stir of modern strife;
No man could point to us
As tearing round upon a motor-bike or -bus!

Prizes to which those others press
Whose ruder minds prefer to mix
In roaring commerce or the stress
Of vulgar party politics—
We two can well afford
To be content without them, can we not, my lord?

The gifts bestowed by Fortune's hand,
Such as they are, for us suffice;
We do not course by sea and land
Nosing each new exotic spice;
We do not need to roam;
We merely move about from home to happy home.

A modest house in Grosvenor Place,
A park, a moor, a hunting-box,
Some decent villas, say a brace,
By Monte's blue, on Capri's rocks—
With these for homely haunts,
I, like yourself, revolt from jumpy outside jaunts.

Yes, you and I, my lord, have found
The golden key to perfect calm,
And, while the Race gets over-wound
For want of this domestic balm,
Our nerves are never racked;
We still contrive to keep our temperate brains
intact.

THE HIGHER KIND OF POET

[Lines written on the occasion of a lecture by Mr. Alfred Austin on "The Growing Distaste on the part of the Many for the Higher Kinds of Poetry." It was delivered during the craze for hunting hidden treasures. The Poet Laureate speaks.]

The laws that treat of rights and wrongs
  I care not greatly who composes;
Let *me* construct the nation's songs,
  And someone else may be her Moses—
So (roughly) ran the immortal phrase,
  But though I can't recall who said it
Full well I know that nowadays
  He wouldn't earn the faintest credit.

How sadly changed the prospect seems
  From what beguiled my early summers,
Passed in the haunt of poets' dreams,
  The breeding hive of brainy hummers!*
O age of unrecorded feats!
  How fair the hopes our boyhood built on
Who meant in time to coo like Keats,
  Or have an organ-mouth like Milton!

*"What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?"—Keats.

What bard has ever rightly sung
  The thoughts that made our bosoms swell up,
When not the biceps, but the lung
  Was what we panted to develop?
When, careless though our fame was mute
  Upon the school's athletic panels,
We let our swift ambitions shoot
  Down purely literary channels?

Spurning the rude barbarian sport
  That makes the modern youth's diversion,
We found our leisure all too short
  For Wordsworth's nobly planned *Excursion;*
Avoiding scenes of vulgar mirth,
  We trod the track of *Goneril's* treasons,
We dived with Dante under earth,
  We strolled with Thomson round *The Seasons.*

So, when I reached a riper age,
  And recognised my vocal mission,
And found my glorious heritage
  Wrapped up with England's best tradition,
I had a passion all along,
  Deep in my inmost vitals rooted,
To keep intact the well of song
  Which Chaucer left us unpolluted.

Speechless at times, through want of thought,
  I burned the dim nocturnal taper;
At times my brain was overwrought
  With serving on a daily paper;

But oft I soared with Shelley's lark
  Through the adjacent empyrean,
And spent the day till after dark
  Emitting one continuous pæan.

Vain, vain employ! The common ruck,
  That raves of Ranji, Tich, or Vardon,
How could it have the taste to pluck
  The precious blooms that prank my garden?
What hope for horny-handed churls
  That seem to take a wanton pleasure
In overlooking obvious pearls,
  While hunting discs of dubious "treasure"?

Not for myself I mourn so much,
  For though my private larynx varies
I joy to keep in constant touch
  With England's roll of pure canaries;
That legacy, the "Higher Kind"
  To which a Laureate owes his billet—
Though lavished on the deaf and blind,
  No mere neglect can wholly kill it!

Yet I am something more than bird,
  I am the nation's seer and mystic,
Ordained to lift the humble herd
  By efforts largely altruistic;
And if I cannot move the mob
  And leave them rather less benighted
Why, then I score a futile blob,
  And must regard my life as blighted.

PEERS v. PEOPLE

Being a fresh example of the old contest between Ignorance (Peers) and Culture (People); between the Powers of Darkness and the Powers of Light.

["Dr. Macnamara, M.P., wished to go to the country to see whether a couple of hundred of very narrow-minded and rather ignorant and entirely antediluvian country gentlemen, and two dozen bishops, who managed to gather up a very large measure of worldly cunning in an odour of sanctified simplicity, were to stand in the way of the expressed wish of the people."—*Press report of meeting of the National Liberal Federation.*]

My lords, can you have pondered deep enough
  What you are in for, you who rashly pit
Those brains composed of agricultural stuff
  Against the Proletariat's urban wit?
    Matching your rustic voice
  With the Elect, the Sacred People's Choice?

Vainly the Titans thought to try their skill
  (Antediluvian bumpkins!) on the gods,
And vainly you defy the People's Will,
  Plunging against incalculable odds;
    That Will, whose changeless laws
  Stand rigid—like a pendulum at pause.

You of the narrow mind—no scholars you,
  But rather ignorant Etonian boors—

And these your Bishops—such a worldly crew,
  Doves with the serpent's cunning in their lures—
    How dare you thus oppose
  The pious *savants* whom the People chose?

My lords, I note your independent air
  Of men with none to say them Yea or Nay,
Since no elector's favour sent you there,
  And no man's whim can pluck you thence away;
    Nothing to gain or lose!
  This makes you sadly prone to honest views.

A fatal habit; and I'm sore afraid
  'Twill be your ruin, if you still rebel
Against the People's verdict as conveyed
  By the Anointed Choice of Camberwell!
    For O, you really are a
  Dreadful offence to Mr. Macnamara!

PILOTS THAT WANT DROPPING

AIR—*Ye Mariners of England.*

Ye mariners of Europe,
  Who run our English seas,
And pouch, beneath the Union Jack,
  Our native pilots' fees,
Under what flag do you propose
  To play the warrior tar,
When the foe wants to know
  The trick of channel and bar,
When the slim torpedo-craft steal up
  Over the harbour-bar.

Dumped out of various countries
  Contiguous with the brine,
'Tis nought to you what noble names
  Have led our battle-line;
Why should you care how Nelson fell
  In the triumph of Trafalgar—
When the night shrouds from sight
  Channel and buoy and bar,
When the slim torpedo-craft steal up
  Over the harbour-bar?

Wherever Mr. Bull works,
  In bank or shop or mart,
You aliens enter in and learn
  His business by the chart;

So here he trains you up to be
  His rivals' guiding star
When they creep, while we sleep,
  By channel and buoy and bar
When the slim torpedo-craft steal up
  Over the harbour-bar.

To you who share our seaways
  On every ebb and flood
The bond of British comradeship
  Is not the bond of blood;
Nature, more close than foster-ties,
  Would prove what race ye are,
When the keel of kindred steel
  Slides in by channel and bar,
When the slim torpedo-craft steal up
  Over the harbour-bar.

We spare, transpontius pilot,
  To write you down a spy,
And yet—you scarce could change your heart
  Then when you changed your sky;
And, since we fain would keep our ships
  Intact of bolt and spar,
You must go, ere the foe
  Slips in by channel and bar,
Ere the slim torpedo-craft steal up
  Over the harbour-bar.

TO A TOAST-MASTER

Preposterous relic of a golden day
  When living programmes, bellowing all they
    knew,
Announced a knighthood fretful for the fray,
  So that the ring might gather who was who—
        Which habit yet persists
In you, the herald of the after-dinner lists;—

How I abhor you, posed behind the Chair,
  A self-appointed patron of the feast,
Much as a rooster stands, with pompous air,
  Upon his midden and acclaims the East;
        How I abhor to hear
Your throaty tones, intolerable chanticleer;

Your unctuous tongue, the haunt of turtle fat,
  Mouthing the qualities of Duke and Lord,
And your "Pray silence for Sir This or That,"
  Which cuts the stillness like a rusty sword,
        And makes the wretched Bart
Mislay the opening pleasantry he had by heart.

Perchance I rise to pledge the Flag, and then
  You interrupt me, just about to sip,
With your absurd "My Lords and Gentlemen,
  The toast is 'Greater Britain.' Hip! Hip!!
        Hip!!!"
        Which always puts me off
So that I have no stomach left to cheer or quaff.

At times I feel that I could kill you dead.
  I find my fingers toying with a knife.
Then suddenly there courses through my head
  A wave of pity—Heavens, what a life!
        And I become quite sorry
For one who suffers such a deal of oratory.

If I can hardly bear it who attend
  These public orgies once or twice *per ann.*,
What must it be for you who, years on end,
  Endure the strain (I marvel how you *can!*)
        Of night-by-night discourses
Touching the merits of our Military Forces?

Maybe your manner, masterful and loud,
  Is meant to hide a heart reduced to stone;
Maybe your starchy front is but a shroud
  For something tragic, if the truth were known;
        A kind of hollow crater
With cold remains of what was once a human waiter.

So in my finger-glass I weep by stealth,
  Musing upon the irony of Fate,
That you, who call the toast of others' health,
  Should be yourself in such a morbid state—
        Your breast, once warm inside,
Now, through incessant speeches, badly petrified.

THOUGHTS ON A "SEASONABLE" CHRISTMAS

There was a period, back some decades three,
  While yet I had the makings of a hero,
When I would crow for very mirth to see
  The glass descend below the line of zero;
When, to the gale impervious, I would go
  Steel-shod across the ringing plains of ice,
Fretting their polish (purposely or no)
        With many a quaint device.

'Tis otherwise to-day; this bitter snap
  Threatens to petrify my skating muscles,
To parch my humours, corrugate my sap,
  And cause a poverty of red corpuscles;
Torpid with cold, my veins no longer hum
  Ecstatically with the coursing blood,
And, if I fell, I know that I should come
        A most infernal thud.

Bucolic sportsmen, such as have a hide
  Of the consistency of rhino leather,
Or he that wears a nose already dyed
  May wallow in this "seasonable" weather;
Young people may allege it makes them fit,
  And cheery elders say, "It might be worse;"
I'm neither young, nor cheery, so I sit
        Inside my grate and curse.

Mind you, I'm not a grumbler; I respect
  (Broadly) the rules of Nature and of Reason;
I hope I should, on principle, reject
  A dish of strawberries gathered out of season;
And, if I overheard the cuckoo's sign
  Uttered, in error, on a winter's day,
I should pretend I hadn't, and decline
        To give the bird away.

I am not exigent, nor claim to bask
  Just now in punts at Maidenhead or Marlow;
But is there not some happy mean? I ask;
  Must I be forced to fly to Monte Carlo?
Must I, against my will, be driven to roam
  In that lone alien clime, who might have done
My honest toil contentedly at home
        At 40° in the sun?

ENGLAND EXPECTS?

Reflections on the Nelson Centenary

If earthward you could wing your flight
  And look on London's central zone,
Seizing that eligible site
  Where stands your counterfeit in stone,
I wonder, Nelson, if your eye
  Would even form the faintest image
Of what emotions underlie
  This tumult, this stupendous scrimmage.

Could you desert that heavenly place
  Where sailors know their pilot-star
To view the many-peopled space
  Named by the name of Trafalgar,
Remembering how your signal ran,
  That still remains a thing of beauty,
You might expect that every man
  This day, as then, would do his duty.

Alas! we have no ships afloat
  Upon the basins in the Square;
It is the landsman's lusty throat
  That rends to-day a saltless air;
And, save from such as hold the main
  To guard her pride among the nations,
England has ceased to entertain
  Much in the way of expectations.

O yes, they'll shout all right enough!
  It costs them little; noise is cheap;
But have they hearts of quite the stuff
  That made your loyal pulses leap?
They'll roar you till their midriffs ache
  Under the bunting's brave devices,
But wouldn't lift a hand to make
  The least of all your sacrifices.

A wind of words—and nothing more!
  But if the test were sought in deeds,
If England asked the sons she bore
  Each man to serve the Mother's needs,
If she "expected" such a debt
  To stir the blood of those that owe it,
The sole response she's like to get
  Would be, "No thanks; not if we know it."

Just now they pipe a patriot tune;
  Anon they'll wonder why they spent
A precious football afternoon
  Mafficking round a monument;
And myriads who go mad to-day—
  Give them a week, they'll go yet madder,
Watching the modern heroes' fray,
  Where hirelings hoof a bounding bladder.

Much you would have to marvel at
  Could you return this autumn-tide;
You'd find the Fleet—thank God for that—
  Staunch and alert as when you died;

But, elsewhere, few to play your part,
  Ready at need and ripe for action;
The rest—in idle ease of heart
  Smiling an unctuous satisfaction.

I doubt if you could well endure
  These new ideals (so changed we are)
Undreamed, Horatio, in your
  Philosophy of Trafalgar;
And, should you still "expect" to see
  The standard reached which you erected,
Nothing just now would seem to be
  So certain as the unexpected.

THE NATION'S SONGS

[From a Press interview with an expert we learn that before the end of October it is decided, after severe tests, what songs are most likely to command popularity in the Christmas pantomimes. From specimens of those that in 1907 were considered practically certain to secure a *succès fou*, one may cull the following *jeu d'esprit* in the philosophic vein:—

"We all came in the world with nothing—no clothes to wear;
When we die, just bear in mind, all our money we shall leave behind.
Finish up! Just the same as we began, without the slightest doubt.
We all came in the world with nothing—
And we can't take anything out."]

If in my heart, that is not dead but slumbers,
I dream remembrance of a youth well spent,
And, stirred by threats of coloured Christmas "numbers"
(Due with the falling leaf), from far I scent
That time of hallowed joy,
With feelings more appropriate to a boy;

If, in my passion for the genial season,
So strangely redolent of syne (auld lang),
I deprecate, as tantamount to treason,
The conduct of the cynic bard who sang:
"Christmas, I'm told, is near";
Adding, "Bear up! it comes but once a year;"

'Tis not, as you will readily imagine,
  That I, by rude dyspepsia rendered wise,
Am deadly keen, as once I was, to cadge in
  The larder-cupboard after Christmas pies,
    Or stretch my tumid jowl
  With stuffing taken from the turkey-fowl;

'Tis not that I have failed to see the folly
  Of mimic battles fought with melting snow;
Not that I care, on principle, for holly,
  Or have a morbid taste for mistletoe;
    Or feel profound delight
  To hear *A Christmas Carol* read at night;

Not that I yearn to quaff the wassail flagon,
  Or suffer tedious after-dinner toasts,
Or filch the fiery raisin from the dragon,
  Or wear a counterpane and play at ghosts,
    Or sing some rotten glee
  (Bridge being always good enough for me).

No! what intrigues me in our Christmas *festas*,
  And has attractions which can never die,
Renewed with living flame like virgin Vesta's—
  It is the Muse whose thoughts do often lie
    Almost too deep for rhyme;
  I mean the sacred Muse of Pantomime.

Think you the bloom of Lyric Verse is blighted
  That it remains a drug upon the mart?

Look at my preface; see the lines I've cited;
And little will you wonder how a heart
Even as old as mine
Can warm itself before that spark divine!

Ah, yes, when Noël's other orgies tire me,
When hunt-the-slipper irks and mince-pies pall,
The Songs of Pantomime can still inspire me
With the old rapture never past recall,
While I have strength to sit
And worship at the shrine of English wit.

CHILDE BIRRELL TO THE DARK TOWER CAME

" Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set
And blew '*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*' "

["No pulse of real life runs through the place (Dublin Castle). The main current of Irish life as it rushes past its walls passes by almost unheeded."—*Mr. Birrell, introducing his Irish Council Bill.*]

Grim stand its walls, as in a ghoulish dream,
  Frowning above the pearly waves of Liffey;
Its attitude toward that historic stream
  Remains deplorably aloof and sniffy;
" Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,"
  Out of the swim of Dublin's sons and daughters,
Seldom or never do its minions go
And plunge their hide-bound bodies in the flow
    Of those pellucid waters.

The River, too, of Life rolls by outside,
  And none within takes notice. Drear and heavy,
The dungeon's portals bar that human tide
  Save when the leading Ogre holds a levee;
In vain her passion Erin's bards rehearse;
  So cold the Castle's heart, so thick its skull is,
That never yet one line of local verse
Voicing the national despair in Erse
    Has dodged its dour portcullis.

When shrewd shillelaghs, hurtling through the air,
Carpet the green with wigs and facial peelings,
Where are the Castle's men? They have no share
In sports that vent the nation's holiest feelings;
They never know the pure moonlighter's thrill
When pruning cows'-tails through the long night-watches;
Nor wake a corpse around the illicit still,
But keep apart, unsociable and chill,
Imbibing alien Scotches.

Ah! when will some great strenuous soul upspring,
Some moral Sandow with a sacred mission
To storm the Castle's walls, and turn the thing
Into a Pan-Hibernian Exhibition?
For he, the last to fare on that crusade—
A frivolous gay knight and fresh-recruited—
Having arrived and whispered "Who's afraid?"
Just set the slug-horn to his lips and played
"*Childe Birrell's come*"—and scooted!

A SECRET COMMISSION

[As far as the author can make out the facts, Augustus, affianced to Amelia, has been instructed by her to purchase some gloves in the West End and forward them to her country address. A secret commission is given to him by a representative of the vendors, but he at once returns it.

Note.—By an Act which came into operation on January 1, 1907, the acceptance of secret commissions constitutes an offence against the law of the land.]

Enclosed, Amelia, you will find the gloves,
  Three pairs, as ordered—suède, and long and fine,
And of a hue to match the turtle-dove's,
  That bird that stands for fond affection's sign;
Also, my conscience being very nice,
  I'd have my lady know exactly what
Secret commission on the market price
    Her true Augustus got.

For she that o'er the counter served and sold
  Had beauty—not of your heart-breaking kind,
But more anæmic, of a frailer mould,
  And (need I say, Amelia?) less refined;
And as I sat a-sampling gloves, and deemed
  That none was good enough to meet the case,
The shop-handmaiden looked at me and beamed,
    Beamed all across her face!

I gave no provocation, I will swear.
  The initiative was hers and hers alone;
She must have noticed my connubial air
  And claimed the sex's triumph as her own;
Anyhow, there before me smiled the girl,
  And O Amelia, count it not for sin
That blushfully I let my features curl
      In a slow fatuous grin.

This trivial detail I should not narrate—
  Plainly a reflex action, pure of guile—
Only that I discovered too, too late
  Your aunt was there and watching all the while;
Therefore I think it best that you should glean
  The truth from me, nor let your judgment err,
Tricked by a lurid version of the scene
      As it appealed to her.

I trust my story (now you have it right)
  May heal between our hearts the threatened
      breach;
Clean is the breast I make; O clasp it tight
  When next I bring it round within your reach!
I took the veiled commission—that is true;
  I had a moment's softening of the brain;
And then I thought of Honour and of You,
      And gave it back again!

THE PEOPLE'S SPORT

"Ludum insolentem ludere pertinax."

[There seems to be a great opening for a new daily paper which will refuse to report professional football.]

That man has surely something wrong inside—
A fractious liver or a frigid heart—
Who in the people's pleasure takes no pride,
But stands in lofty attitudes apart,
Quite unimpressed
By what immediately concerns the general breast.

Myself, whenever, walking down the street,
I ask what moves him most, the Man therein,
I feel my pulses bounding, beat for beat,
In strictest time with those that toil and spin;
I could not bear
To think that in their joys and griefs I had no share.

On opening nights, among the gallery-folk,
I like to echo every thrill and throb,
To laugh in tune with such as see a joke
And souse my handkerchief with such as sob;
And, when it's through,
Rise up in god-like wrath and boo with those that boo.

And, less from economic motives than
  Because my heart goes out to all that mete
Strong wine of words to melt the Average Man,
  Being themselves a sort of *plébiscite*,
    Over my mess
Of matin porridge, I peruse the ½d. Press.

But there are limits. I have bravely borne
  The shock of cricket jargon, reams on reams,
That spoilt with punctual blast each summer morn,
  And now—how petty that infliction seems
    Compared with these
Five serried columns stuffed with football pleasantries.

Yet in a hundred scenes, all much the same,
  I know that weekly half a million men
(Who never actually played the game),
  Hustling like cattle herded in a pen,
    Look on and shout
While two-and-twenty hirelings hack a ball about.

I know it; yet I hardly care at all
  Whether the Wolves break up the Throstles' wings,
Or Sheffield Friday gives the Saints a fall,
  Or Pompey round the Reds is making rings,
    Or in the Spurs,
Once firmly fixed in front, a falling-off occurs.

Against my *Chronicle* I bring no charge;
It but reflects the Proletariat's views,
And I must either mentally enlarge,
Or float a nobler brand of *Daily News*,
And bar its page
To soccer as the social curse that blights the Age.

GAMES AND THE MAN

["Sport," according to Mr. Cunninghame Graham, "has often been defended as being the image of war, and as tending to render those who engage in it manly and warlike. . . . But there are the Japanese, none of whom are sportsmen, for one can hardly class their fishing (after a battle) in the category of sport. . . . Is any nation of sportsmen more brave or more warlike?"]

O for the faiths of long ago
  On which our fancy loved to lean,
When naked Truth was still to know,
  And we were young and very green;
Now are they mostly hollow myths,
  Like to the "king y-crowned in Fairy,"
Or those high gods in Dr. Smith's
  Inimitable Dictionary.

To history's radium, piercing through,
  Reluctantly each legend yields—
Witness the tale of Waterloo
  As won on Eton's playing fields;
Its authorship is not in doubt;
  The Duke unquestionably said it;
Only, the facts therein set out
  Are deemed no longer worthy credit.

We nursed, till now, the cherished creed
  That none could cope with sword and flames,
Or do a dashing warrior-deed,
  Save he excelled in "manly games";

Games were "a mimic warfare," and
  Unless an officer could play 'em
He had no leg on which to stand.
  "O hasn't he?" says Mr. Graham!

"Go mark the Jap! He wades in gore,
  He gives, and takes, the shrewdest knocks,
Although he never snicked a four,
  Or ran to earth the ruddy fox;
He laughs to hear the bullets hum,
  '*Banzai!*' he yells and lays the foe low;
And yet he never screwed a scrum,
  Or took a casual toss at polo.

"How he achieves it, who can say?
  I don't suppose he ever stood
Intent to grass his fluttered prey
  Outside a pheasant-haunted wood;
Yet thus employed, or in the course
  Of armed affrays with instant rabbits,
We think to learn that cool resource
  Which stamps the man of martial habits.

"'Tis true, at times, he has his fling
  Upon a river-bank or mole,
Trying for fish with baited string
  Dependent from a bamboo-pole;
Yet he pursues this gentle art
  Rather by way of relaxation
Than as a prime essential part
  Of military education.

"He routs the Cossack; yet he spends
  No time on racing, nor can see
Much merit in a school that tends
  To feats (we're told) of chivalry;
Can you conceive *our* soldiers' brains
  Reft of the tipster's useful knowledge?
Or picture Ascot's tented plains
  Without the Camberley Staff-College?"

O Mr. Graham, you have cleft
  This heart in two by your report;
At worst we had one solace left—
  Our manhood's faith in British Sport!
The rest might go—art, science, trade—
  Sport was the only thing that mattered;
On this the Empire's base was laid,
  And now—that last illusion's shattered!

A TONIC FOR THE DUMPS

["The difficulty in the photograph post-card business is to find new ideas. The public is tiring of the laughing girls. The demand is for the pensive, the soulful, and the spirituelle."]

When in my walks abroad, a sombre bard,
  I sampled Beauties, unimpaired by age,
Perpetuating on a postal card
  The stolid giggle hallowed by the Stage;

When I observed the lips that gaped apart,
  The boon expanse of teeth, the dimpled chin
(Proof of the rapture they derived from Art)—
  O! how I grudged them that perennial grin!

"Nightly," I said, "they play their lyric scene,
  And wag their legs about, and wear a smile,
And even when they've washed their faces clean
  It won't come off; they wear it all the while.

"*I* couldn't do it. Though I had the wit
  To hum in tights beneath a picture hat,
Or wave my petticoats to thrill the pit,
  I couldn't keep a steady smile like that.

"I follow Art myself—in humbler ways,
  Where elements of laughter ought to lurk,
Yet, being photographed, I fail to raise
  More than the ghostly semblance of a smirk."

Something was wanting. That was why I bought
These types of grinning Beauty by the gross,
And set them on my mantelpiece and thought:
"This spectacle will make me less morose."

It didn't. On the contrary, I wore
An air of worse depression every day,
Till I could bear the dreadful sight no more,
Because in that direction madness lay.

Thank Heaven that saved my reason in the nick!
For Fashion, not before the hour was ripe,
Dethroned the simpering sort that made me sick
And boomed instead the pensive, soulful type.

Now in my gallery, stocked with fresh supplies
(Ethereal creatures, save in point of wings),
I see the spirit gaze through dreamy eyes,
Trying to cope with transcendental things;

Above unearthly brows a vague unrest,
Sign of immortal yearning, darkly broods,
And lo! a weight is lifted off my chest,
And I am purged of pessimistic moods;

Yes, when I watch them doing all they know
To look the part of Intellectual Grace,
Then to the winds I let my megrims go,
And laugh till I am crimson in the face!

AN END OF DANCING

" Nunc arma, defunctumque bello
Barbiton hic paries habebit."

" Unarm, Eros."

Time was, a few brief lustres back,
When in the many-damsel'd dance,
Ere I had grown supine and slack,
It was my purest joy to prance
The whole night long,
Returning with the milkman's matin song.

My waist was relatively slim,
And to the waltz's amorous flow
None brought a lustier turn of limb,
A lighter, more elastic toe;
It was a treat
Merely to sit and watch my mobile feet.

But now the jumping movement jars
Upon a frame maturely stout;
And when I've borne a dozen bars
I find my wind is giving out;
I wheeze; I puff;
I tell my partner I have had enough.

And while I undergo repair,
  And she, impatient, paws the ground,
I ask myself what brought me there,
  Why should I go careering round,
        Hustled and hot,
And talking unimaginable rot?

Such, roughly, be the reasons why
  At 10 p.m., replete with food,
When o'er a pipe my pensive eye
  Betrays the after-dinner mood,
        I loathe to rise
And irk myself with choric exercise.

Ah, Ladies, you whose halls of light
  Lament the dearth of dancing males,
Have pity! Though my heart is right,
  Think of the solid flesh that quails!
        Ask me no more
To pound with ponderous foot the shining floor!

And you, Terpsichore, the One
  I wooed the most of all the Nine!—
Now that my palmy days are done,
  Now, ere my drooping powers decline
        By further slumps—
To you I dedicate these pious pumps!

IN MEMORIAM

George Frederick Watts.

Born, 1817. Died, July 1, 1904.

Here, in an age when fashion's test of worth
  Follows the price at which the markets buy,
When the great Thought that slips the bounds of earth
  Gives way to craftsmanship of hand and eye;

When Art, content to find perfection's goal
  Through schemes of form and colour, light and shade,
Cares not to make appeal from soul to soul
  Lest she should trespass on the preacher's trade;

He knew her destined mission, dared to hail
  The place assigned her in the heavenly plan,
Reader of visions hid behind the veil,
  Elect interpreter of God to man.

His means were servants to the end in view,
  And not the end's self; so his heart was wise
To hold—as they have held, the chosen few—
  High failure dearer than the easy prize.

Now, lifted face to face with unseen things
  Dimly imagined in the lower life,
He sees his *Hope* renew her broken strings,
  And *Love and Death* no more at bitter strife.

THOMAS JOHN BARNARDO.

Born, 1845. Died, September 19, 1905.

"Suffer the children unto Me to come,
  The little children," said the voice of Christ,
And for his law whose lips to-day are dumb
  The Master's word sufficed.

"Suffer the little children——" so He spake,
  And in His steps that true disciple trod,
Lifting the helpless ones, for love's pure sake,
  Up to the arms of God.

Naked, he clothed them; hungry, gave them food;
  Homeless and sick, a hearth and healing care;
Led them from haunts where vice and squalor brood
  To gardens clean and fair.

By birthright pledged to misery, crime, and shame,
  Jetson of London's streets, her "waifs and strays,"
Whom she, the Mother, bore without a name,
  And left, and went her ways—

He stooped to save them, set them by his side,
  Breathed conscious life into the still-born soul,
Taught truth and honour, love and loyal pride,
    Courage and self-control.

Till of her manhood, here and overseas,
  On whose supporting strength her state is throned,
None better serves the Motherland than these
    Her sons the once disowned.

To-day, in what far lands, their eyes are dim,
  Children again, with tears they well may shed,
Orphaned a second time who mourn in him
    A foster-father dead.

But he, who had their love for sole reward,
  In that far home to which his feet have won—
He hears at last the greeting of his Lord:
    "Servant of Mine, well done!"

BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO. LD., LONDON AND TONBRIDGE.